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"DON'T SEND ME TO PRISON, MR. WESTON! OH, PLEASE DON'T SEND ME TO PRISON!"
WAILED THE MISERABLE JACK.

OR,
The City Detective's Big Haul.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "BROADWAY BILLY" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

TWO CASES AT ONE TIME.

"WELL, that's what I call a strange case," observed Happy Harry, when the man had taken his leave.

"Yes, so it is," Broadway Billy agreed. "It is about as strange a case as has ever come into our hands. Don't you think so, Seth?"

And the Silent Shadower nodded.

"Let us look at the matter, now," the young chief proposed, "and see what we can make of

it. Here is Hickman Shyrock, a well-known merchant of this city, who has been in the habit of absenting himself from his family and his business frequently for two or three days at a time, now mysteriously missing; has been gone about two weeks. He was thought to be in Philadelphia, where he has a branch of his business, but has not been there at all, although it was understood that he was going there when he left home. His wife is anxious about him, and wants us to look him up. So much for that part of it.

"Now, the man who was just here to put the matter into our hands, Spencer Witherton by name, is manager of Shyrock's store in this city. He told us more about the man than is evidently known to Mrs. Shyrock; that is, that in nine cases out of ten when he absented himself from home and was supposed to be in Philadelphia, he has not been there at all, and no one knows where he was. His face, it seems, has been seen at his Philadelphia store scarcely once in two or three months, although he has been absent from home and his business here about as much as he has been present. But, he has never been away for so long a time as now, and hence the family want him hunted up.

"That is the case in a nutshell; and I repeat, it is about as strange a matter as has ever come into our hands. There has been something mysterious about the man all along, and in order to find him we shall have to ascertain what that something was. Can we do it?"

"Do it?" repeated Harry. "We'll do it, boss, or bu'st the harness trying, that's all."

"That is the way to talk, Harry; we have taken the case and must sift it if we can."

"Well, what are you going to do first, boss?"

"I think I'll go and see Mrs. Shyrock."

"And what shall we do to help?"

"You might go to the store and pick up any information that is lying around loose."

"Good enough. We are in for it, whether it means a tame case or a hummer; it is all the same to us. Come along, Seth."

Silent Seth was ready, and the "team" left the office.

Business had been dull for a few days, and the boys were anxious to be up and doing, though the present matter did not appear to promise the excitement they liked.

When they had gone out Billy mused a little.

"It is plain that Shyrock was not living an open life," he reasoned. "And it may puzzle me to get on the right track. Where did he spend his time when not at home or at the store, and yet not at Philadelphia where he was supposed to be? What was the reason for that game? There is something crooked here, and I'll have to try to sift it out straight before I can hope to make much headway. Well, I'll go and see the woman first, anyhow."

He rose and prepared to set out, but before he left the office he had another caller.

The visitor was a man, one about twenty-five years of age, well dressed and rather good-looking.

"Mr. Weston?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," Billy acknowledged.

"My name, sir, is Vance Willey; I am head clerk in the banking house of Gaffner Stiverson. I would like to have you come with me to the bank immediately."

"Why, what's up?"

"Robbery has been done."

"Have you notified the police?"

"Not yet, sir; thought we would have you come first."

"All right; I'll go with you; but you had better let the police take hold of it, too."

"Perhaps we will; but, we'll see what you have to say about it first, and then act accordingly. It is a mysterious matter, sir."

"Most such cases are, sir. In what way is this one mysterious?"

"Owing to the fact that no damage has been done to locks or safe; the safe was opened by some one having the combination."

"And how many at the bank had that?"

"Only two; myself and Mr. Stiverson."

"Have you seen him since the discovery?"

"Mr. Stiverson is at home sick in bed. It is understood that he is quite low, too. I could not bother him with it."

"Then it is out of the question that he took the money himself—I suppose it was money that was taken."

"Yes, it was money; about twelve thousand dollars in all; all the bills that happened to be in sight when the safe was opened. Looks like a hasty job."

"And, since Mr. Stiverson cannot have taken it, suspicion might fall upon you, being the only other who knew the combination. What about

your cashier? Did he not have the combination?"

"I am cashier myself, as well as teller and chief clerk, sir. Ours is not a regular bank, you understand; rather an exchange, or private accommodation concern."

"Two remarks you have not responded to, Mr. Willey."

"Eh?"

"I say you have not responded to two of my remarks. I suppose it is out of the question that Mr. Stiverson took the money himself; we will take that for granted. Then, the next one to look to would naturally be you yourself."

"Yes, that is true; I do not like the situation at all, Mr. Weston. I am as innocent of the theft as you are, yet I am the only one who knew the combination, in the absence of Mr. Stiverson. I found the safe unlocked and open when I went to open it for business."

"Only a little while ago?"

"Less than half an hour, I think; I came right here."

"Well, let's go and take a look around and I'll see if we can pick up a clue anywhere."

They left the office and took a car.

When they left the car a little walk brought them to the bank.

The chief clerk led the way in, Billy following him and taking quick note of the clerks present.

There were two of these; one a man of middle age and the other a youth of seventeen or so, and they appeared frightened at what had taken place.

"There, sir, is the safe, just as I found it," the cashier said, pointing to the safe as he spoke.

"You are quite sure you locked it last night, are you?" Billy asked.

"Oh, yes; I never fail to make sure of that: I say to myself—'You are fast,' when I turn the knob."

"Just show me how you do it, please."

Mr. Willey stepped to the safe and locked it, and then trying it, repeated the words he had spoken.

"Not much chance for a doubt there, if you make that a practice," remarked Billy, as he noticed how it was done.

"And I always do it that way, sir; Jones and Jack here can tell you that."

The middle-aged man and the youth both nodded their assent.

"Now, show me how you unlock the safe," said Billy.

Willey stooped, turned the combination a few times, and swung open the door. No key was used.

Billy was standing quite near, and had tried to catch the combination but found it impossible to do so. It was not likely that either of the other clerks had ever learned it.

"That will do, so far as the safe is concerned," he spoke. "Now, how did the robber gain entrance to the office?"

"Another part of the mystery. Jack was the one to get here first, and he assures me that he found the door properly locked."

"How many carry keys to the door?"

"All of us."

"And Mr. Stiverson has one, too?"

"Yes."

"None of you three allowed your key to go out of your possession last night, did you?"

"We seem to be certain on that point," answered Willey; and to that the others gave their agreement.

"It is a puzzler, true enough. You have not found anything in the way of a clue, I suppose?"

"Nothing."

"And the amount missing, you said is twelve thousand dollars."

"About that sum. I can give you the exact figures in a moment by glancing at my books. Shall I do so?"

"No, no matter; it is large enough. Now, another point: was the money marked so that you would know it if you were to see it again?"

"No, sir; it was not."

"How was it done up?"

"In hundred, five hundred, and thousand dollar packages."

"Were these packages labeled?"

"Yes; the amount was on each, with my initials, V. W., in blue pencil, on the band around the package."

"That is something to know, at any rate, though it is not likely we will ever see the labels, unless we can come upon the thief quickly. Is there anything further you can tell me?"

"I think not, sir."

"Is there any one whom you suspect?"

"Not a soul. I am at loss completely. My fear is that suspicion will fall on me."

"As it is likely to do. Can you clear yourself if it does?"

"I can only prove where I was during the evening, and that I entered my boarding-house about ten o'clock."

"That will be something in your favor; and, I am well enough satisfied in my own mind that you are innocent. Who, then is the guilty one?"

"I only wish I could point him out to you."

"Well, let me take a look around here a little more closely, and then you may notify the police or not, just as you please."

With that Billy began to search around carefully, with the faint hope that he might find something which would point to the person guilty of the crime.

CHAPTER II.

BILLY IS PUZZLED HERE.

BROADWAY BILLY had a double reason for his remark concerning his belief in the innocence of the young chief clerk.

In the first place, he did believe him innocent; and then, in case he made a mistake in his estimate of the man, and he was guilty, he would feel himself to be the more secure.

Billy reasoned that, had Willey taken the money, he would have taken care no suspicion could fall upon him—would have forced the safe, or at any rate left some evidence of regular burglary. Then, too, he would have had an alibi all ready at his tongue's end.

The search around the office revealed nothing, and Billy went out and looked at the front door, through which entrance was supposed to have been gained.

"There was no mark there of any sort, but he hardly looked for anything of the kind."

"How about the windows?" he asked of Willey.

"All fast," was the answer. "They are seldom opened."

The banking office was in what had once been a private house, and a stoop led up to its entrance.

By the side of the stoop was a grating, with a heavy rail around it, to give light to the basement floor of the building.

There had been steps and a door, at some time, but they had been taken out and the space solidly walled up. The basement was now used for coal only.

Billy leaned over the rail of the stoop and peered through the grating in question, and as he did so an exclamation escaped him.

"Ha! here may be something," he exclaimed.

"What is it?" asked Willey.

"Has the appearance of a skeleton key. How can we get down there?"

"Jack can go down, open one of the windows and get out and get it. Jack, you hear?"

He heard, and was already going.

Quite a group had now collected by the stoop, and each person was eager to know what was the matter, but no information was given them.

The youth was not long in getting down into the space under the grating, and immediately discovered the object that had caught Billy's eye, speedily returning with it.

It was a skeleton key, true enough.

Billy took it from him and tried it in the door, but could not make it work.

"Let us go inside," he said, then.

They entered the office, and the crowd without was left to form their own conclusions by what they had seen.

"This key has not lain there long, you see," Billy called attention, "for it is new and clean. It was probably dropped there last night. But, it will not unlock the door."

"Are you sure you know how to use it?" asked the middle aged clerk, Jones.

"Well, there may be something in that," Billy admitted. And turning to the chief clerk, he added:

"You had better inform the police, Mr. Willey, I think, and give them this key, telling them where you found it. I will take hold, too, but on the quiet. That will be the better way, I think."

"All right, Mr. Weston; I believe you know what is best."

Billy took his leave, turning the matter over in his mind as he walked away. A thought came to him and he went back.

The chief clerk looked up with some surprise at seeing him again so soon, and came forward at once to learn the reason for his return.

"What brings you back?" he asked.

"I wanted to ask you if you have yet sent word to Mr. Stiverson about this loss?"

"I was just in the act of writing a note to Mrs. Stiverson when you came in. Not knowing how Mr. Stiverson is this morning, I thought it best to tell her and leave it to her to tell him."

"A good idea. Will you allow me to take the note to the house?"

"Why, I was going to send Jack."

"On second thought, you need not write a note at all; just let me go there and inform the lady about it, from you. And if there is anything you want to ask her, I will return with whatever answer she may give."

"You have some object in this."

"Certainly."

"Well, you may do the errand, then. I will tell you about what I intended to write. That is, that the bank has been robbed to the tune of about twelve thousand dollars; no clue to the robbers; have put a detective on the case, and have also informed the police. Tell her to let Mr. Stiverson know it when he can stand it. Also say that I shall have to draw upon our reserve in order to meet to-day's demands."

"All right," assented Billy. "I'll carry the message straight enough. What is the address?"

It was given, and as it was going to take him close to the Shyrock residence, Billy could kill two birds with one stone, as the saying goes.

In due time he pulled the bell at the Stiverson mansion, and a servant opened the door.

"How is Mr. Stiverson this morning?" Billy made inquiry.

"He is about the same, sir," was the answer.

"Then he is pretty sick, I believe."

"Yes, sir."

"Is Mrs. Stiverson at home?"

"Yes."

"I want to see her."

"What name, please?"

"Weston. Tell her I am here from the office, with important news."

"Yes, sir. Step right into the room, sir."

Billy entered the parlor, and presently the door opened and a woman came into the room. She was young, not more than thirty at most, and good-looking, with black eyes and hair.

If this was Mrs. Stiverson, she was a much younger person than Billy had expected to see, for he knew the banker was a man well on in years.

"Mrs. Stiverson?" he interrogated.

"Yes, sir," was the response. "You want to see me?"

"Yes, madam. I am here with a message from Mr. Stiverson's chief clerk."

"And what is the message? Something he desires to ask Mr. Stiverson! I am afraid we cannot bother him with business questions."

"It is for you to decide whether you will inform him or not. The fact of the matter is, the bank was robbed last night to the tune of about twelve thousand dollars, and there is no clue to the robber."

"Mercy sakes! You do not mean it?"

"That is the fact of the matter, madam. What do you think about informing Mr. Stiverson?"

"It will never do. The excitement it would bring would be too much for him. It must be kept away from him, no matter at what cost, sir."

"Well, no doubt you are right about it. Mr. Willey wanted me to say he has employed a detective and has notified the police. Also that he will have to draw on the reserve fund in order to meet obligations to-day."

"I suppose he knows what is best to do; I am sure I do not. You are not employed by Mr. Stiverson, are you, sir? I have never seen you at the office."

"No; I am merely playing the part of messenger for Mr. Willey. Do you know of any person who may be suspected in the matter, Mrs. Stiverson?"

"Then you are the detective?"

"What makes you think so?"

"Your question, sir."

"Well, then, I am the detective! Can you point suspicion to any person?"

"Why, no, certainly not. I suppose it must have been some professional burglar, and what can I know about such?"

"On the contrary, madam, it was nothing of the kind. The money was stolen by some one who had the combination to the safe and who could open the office door without trouble."

"You astonish me!"

"The door was found locked and all right, but the safe was open and the money gone. You see how it is, and that is why I asked if you can

direct suspicion against any one. It is likely to prove a very puzzling affair, I am afraid."

"No; I cannot suspect any one, sir. Mr. Willey—"

But she stopped.

"I think you are about to say Mr. Willey is the only one who knows the combination. Am I right?"

"Yes, you are. I mentioned his name before I thought. I would not cast a suspicion upon him for the world, sir; in fact, I am sure he is innocent."

The woman's frankness impressed Billy favorably.

"But, Mr. Stiverson himself is the only other who could open the safe," he observed.

"Yes, that is true. I have heard Mr. Stiverson say so."

"Can you show me his key to the office?"

"I will do so if I can find it; I presume it is in one of his pockets. I will see."

She rose and left the room, and was gone some minutes.

When she returned she had a large key in her hand, which she gave to Billy with the remark:

"I do not understand, of course, why you should want to see this key, but here it is, though I cannot permit you to take it away with you."

"And why can you not allow that?" Billy asked.

"Because, pardon me, I do not know you, sir. I have only your bare word for what you have said."

"That is true. It is not my intention, however, to make and such request; I merely wanted to see the key, to have an idea of it in my mind."

"Oh!"

Billy had already looked at the key all he cared to, and gave it back.

"I presume it is needless for me to ask whether it was possible for this key to have been out of the house last night?" he observed.

"Out of the question, sir," was the prompt answer. "It was in Mr. Stiverson's pocket, and his clothes are hanging in a closet where they have been for ten days at least. It was there last night, of course."

"Well, here is my card," and Billy rose to take his leave. "If you should learn anything of importance, please send me word to my office. You must use your own judgment about telling Mr. Stiverson. I'll do what I can toward solving the mystery."

CHAPTER III.

WHAT THE SON SAID.

WHEN Billy left the house he bent his steps in the direction of the Shyrock residence, where it had been his intention to go first.

And as he went along he was running the latest case over in his mind, trying to get something to work upon, but finding nothing, thus far. It had the appearance of a hard nut to crack.

His object in asking to see the office key had not been so much because he wanted to see it as to ascertain whether it had been in the house that night. He was well enough satisfied that the wire key he had found was not the one with which the door had been unlocked and locked again.

"It's a knotty one, sure enough," he said to himself. "I can't think Willey is guilty, and neither does Mrs. Stiverson. I did think that maybe she had had a hand in it, but now that I have seen her I have to give up that idea. Who, then, was it? I shall have to dig deeper in order to find out. Well, I'll lay that case by on the shelf for the present."

He had now reached the Shyrock residence.

This house was not more than three minutes' walk from the Stiverson mansion.

His ring at the bell brought a servant to the door, hardly necessary to say, and he asked for Mrs. Shyrock.

He was shown into a room and the servant carried his name to her mistress, who very soon made her appearance, proving to be a woman past middle life.

"I presume you are the detective Mr. Witherton spoke to me about last night," she immediately greeted. "I am Mrs. Shyrock, sir."

"There is no doubt about my being the person, I guess," Billy made response, "for I am a detective, and it was a Mr. Witherton who came to my office and engaged me to look for Mr. Shyrock."

"Well, what do you think of the matter, sir?"

"It smacks strongly of the mysterious," Billy declared.

"And so it certainly is. Where do you suppose Mr. Shyrock can be?"

"Impossible for me to guess, madam. I must try to get some enlightenment by questioning you."

"Very well."

"What were your husband's habits?"

"They were excellent, sir. No one could find fault with him."

"He was in the habit of going away frequently, Mr. Witherton told me. I suppose you know where he was at such a time?"

"Certainly; he has a branch of his business in Philadelphia, and some of his time had to be spent there. In fact, fully a half of his time has been spent in that city for the past twelve years."

"There is no doubt about that, I suppose?"

"None. I have gone with him a good many times, and at other time he has sent for me, when he had to stay longer than usual."

"But, it seems, he has not been there this time, though he left home with the intention of going there. Can you tell me anything that will throw light upon his possible whereabouts?"

"I am afraid not, sir. I fear that he may have been killed."

"Have you any reason for thinking he has been killed?"

"No, I do not know that I have."

"How long is it since you were here last with your husband in Philadelphia, Mrs. Shyrock?"

"Oh, it must be a couple of years, I should think. I disliked putting up at a hotel, and so stopped going."

"Did you go very often before that?"

"Oh, no; maybe two or three times a year; certainly not more than that."

"It was about twelve years ago, I understand you to say, when Mr. Shyrock opened his branch in Philadelphia."

"Yes, sir."

"And before that time what was his habit?"

"In what respect do you mean?"

"Was he as closely attentive to business in his one store then, as he was after that in both of them?"

"Yes, he was strictly attentive to business, Mr. Weston. When not at the store he was home, and when not at home, at the store. He seldom got out of the groove of shop life and home life."

Billy was thinking within himself as he put the questions and he heard the answers to them.

Mr. Shyrock's irregularity, it would seem, had begun about the time of the opening of his branch store, and whatever there was mysterious about it now had had its beginning then.

In order to get on the right track, he believed, he must go back to that time and learn all he could about the Mr. Shyrock of that day. By so doing, he might be able to pick up the thread that would lead to the solving of the whole mystery. He saw no other way.

"Have you a likeness of your husband?" he asked.

"Yes, certainly; I must show it to you."

"If you please."

She brought an album and pointed out the photograph of a rather fine-looking man past middle age.

"And how long since this was taken?" Billy inquired.

"Not more than four years ago," was the reply. "It looks about as he looked the last time I saw him."

Billy fixed the features well upon his mind. He would know the man, he believed, no matter where he saw him.

When he had asked several questions, and just as he was about leaving, a young man entered the room abruptly.

He stopped short on seeing a stranger there.

"Your pardon, mother," he said, quickly. "I thought you were alone."

"Stop, do not withdraw," the woman spoke; "this is the detective Witherton has sent to me—Mr. Weston."

"Broadway Billy?" cried the young man, holding out his hand. "He could not have made a better choice, mother. I have heard a good deal about you, Mr. Weston. I hope you can be of some use to us."

"I certainly hope I may," Billy responded, accepting his hand. "I will try, anyhow."

"My son, Mr. Horace Shyrock," the mother finished the introduction.

Billy had sized him up quickly. He was about twenty-four years of age, at a guess, and had the air of being a pretty fast young man.

"Do you think you can find father?" he asked.

"Hard to tell," Billy answered. "I must get on track of him before I can hope to do so."

"Yes, true enough. I only wish we could help you more than we can, but that seems to be out of the question, for we are at loss utterly."

"Are you in business with your father?"

"No; I'm in for myself. Have a store of my own."

"Mr. Shyrock thought it would be better for him to take a business upon his own shoulders," Mrs. Shyrock explained, "so he started him, and Horace is aiming to work up as his father did."

"Well, I must leave you, now. If you learn anything, please let me know at my office."

"We'll do so, certainly," agreed Horace. "But, hold on, and I'll go with you, for I am going out. I just came in, mother, to tell you a piece of news. Mr. Stiverson's bank was robbed last night, and Willey has been arrested for the theft."

Here was astonishment for Broadway Billy.

It was only a little time since he had been at the bank, and the arrest must have followed very quickly.

"Is it possible!" cried Mrs. Shyrock. "This must be kept from Grace, Horace. It will kill her. Surely, there must be some mistake; I can never believe it of Vance Willey."

"I guess it is true enough. Witherton just came from there, and he said the police had just come and made the arrest. Willey is all broke up over it, he says, and no wonder, for I haven't much doubt of his guilt; they found some of the stolen money on him."

Billy had taken it all in, quietly.

"Acquaintance of yours?" he asked.

"Yes; head clerk in the bank where father has his account."

"What leads you to think him guilty, before he has a fair chance to defend himself?"

"Doesn't it look bad enough against him, when they actually find the money on him, or, at any rate, some of it? I don't see how he is going to get out of it."

"And who is the Grace you mentioned, Mrs. Shyrock?"

"My daughter, sir."

"Oh! Well, I will bid you good-morning. Now, Mr. Shyrock, if you are going my way."

So Billy took his leave, Horace accompanying him, and finding the young man was on his way to his place of business, and that it was not out of his path, Billy proposed going there with him.

While interested in the Shyrocks, it was well enough to learn all he could about them.

"I want to tell you something, Weston," the young man observed, "and that is something I could not say in mother's hearing. I happen to know that father has not been giving her a square deal all around."

"No!" queried Billy, by negation.

"Not by any means, though I don't know just what he was up to. I thought I would post you, so that you needn't give him away to her unless you have to. He has not been traveling the road to Philadelphia half as much as she thinks he has."

"Where then has he been spending his time away from home?"

"That is what I don't know. I have been talking with his man Witherton, and he has told me a good deal, though he don't know any more than I do when it comes to the point."

"Well, can you tell me of any very intimate friend your father had? Some one to whom he would be likely to unburden himself, if to anybody?"

"No, I can't; father wasn't that kind of a man."

"What kind of man?"

"One to tell his secret business to anybody. He was as close as a clam, and never told anybody anything."

"You don't suppose he was engaged in any secret business of which he was ashamed, do you?"

"Oh, no, I don't think that; I wouldn't tell you, a detective, if I did."

"Hardly to be expected that you would."

CHAPTER IV.

HARRY AND SETH ON DECK.

In the meantime Happy Harry and Silent Seth had been playing their parts in the beginning of the game, though they were such as did not promise much excitement.

Leaving the office they set out for the business place of Mr. Shyrock, the address of which they had, of course.

"This here looks to me like a dry case, even if it is a deep one, as the boss thinks," observed Harry, as they went along.

The Silent Shadower, with nothing to say, said nothing.

" Didn't ye hear what I said?" demanded Harry.

" Yes."

" Then why didn't you open your head and say so? It's like talkin' to a post, to talk to you."

" You know I'm not deaf."

" That's all right; but when I talk to a fellow I want him to talk back at me. See? Now, what do you think about this case, anyhow?"

" What's the use of thinking about it at all, till we get hold of something to set our thinkers at work? There, now, I've satisfied you by talking; please satisfy me by keeping still."

" Whew! what a speech fer you, Seth! But, you must think I'm mighty easy satisfied, if that will satisfy me. And as fer my keeping still—you might as well ask the wind to stop blowing. Couldn't do it, nōhow. Have to keep my jaw wagging, since I have to talk for both of us."

So Harry rattled away at his usual rate, and kept it up till they reached their destination, without having said much of anything, in Seth's estimation.

Mr. Shyrock's store was a concern of some magnitude, as the boys found, and a clerk stepped up to them when they entered.

" We want to see Mr. Shyrock," said Harry.

" He is not here, sir," was the polite information.

" Do you know when he will be?"

" Impossible to say; he is out of town."

" That seems to settle it then," said Harry, turning to Seth. " What shall we do about it?"

" We shall have to come in again, I suppose," was Seth's decision.

" May I ask what your business is with Mr. Shyrock?" inquired the clerk.

" We cannot tell you, as it is wholly private," answered Harry.

" But, you may tell it to our chief clerk, or rather manager," the clerk suggested. " He has gone to the bank, and will be back again presently. Mr. Shyrock trusts all matters to him."

" We might wait, then," said Seth.

" Very well; take seats and be comfortable."

The clerk was a good sort of fellow, as the boys agreed, and they accepted his invitation readily.

They hardly saw what was to be gained by their waiting, but it did give them a good chance to look around the place and take note of the different employees whom they saw.

While they were thus idly employed doing nothing, a man came into the store—one who was evidently no stranger there. He was about forty years of age, rather stylish in dress and manner, and one who bore the stamp of good society upon him in open sight.

" Morning!" he greeted the clerk.

" Good-morning, Mr. Robiston," the clerk responded.

" Is Mr. Witherton in?"

" No; he has gone to the bank, sir. He ought to be back pretty soon."

" I'll wait. I dropped in to see him about that draft of mine he was to cash for me this morning. I suppose he's gone to the bank to get the money."

" Very likely he has, sir; I think I heard him mention your name to one of the boys as he went out. Hey, Harbard, what did Mr. Witherton say to you as he was going out?"

The man addressed was just coming forward from the rear of the store.

" Why, he told me to ask Mr. Robiston to wait, if he came in before he got back again."

" That is all I want to know, then," the man Robiston remarked. " I will wait for him, since I have nothing on hand at present."

So he took a chair at a little distance from the two boys, favoring them with a passing glance as he did so.

Taking a paper from his pocket he began to glance at the items of news.

He had not been thus engaged for many minutes when another personage entered the store.

This time it was a younger man, one perhaps about twenty-four years of age, and who had the air of being quite at home there.

He glanced around, and seeing Robiston, advanced to him at once.

" Good morning!" extending his hand.

" Hello, Horace; good-morning!" he was greeted.

The pair shook hands, and the new-comer also took a seat.

" Well, what is the good word?" the elder of the pair inquired.

" Oh, everything is lovely," was the response.

" How is it with you?"

" The same. I have dropped in to see Witherton, but he has gone to the bank, so I am waiting for him."

" And I have come to see if anything has been heard of father yet."

" He is still missing, eh?"

" Yes."

" Strange case."

" You are right it is a strange case. Mother has decided to put a detective on the matter at last."

" That so? Whom will she employ?"

" I don't know yet. She had Witherton at the house last night, talking the matter over with him, and he was to see to it for her this morning."

" Why didn't she let you do that?"

" Because I did not happen to be there when she came to her decision, I suppose. I am not as regular as a clock, like Witherton, and she knows that, you see. I do not grieve."

Harry and Seth were taking this all in.

They were getting some meat, after all, where they had expected little or nothing.

Presently the man Robiston turned and favored them with a stare for a moment, but found them attending strictly to their own business, not even looking in the direction of himself and his companion.

" How did it work?" they heard him ask, then, in a lower tone.

" Fine," was the reply, in the same guarded manner.

" If that is so, it is all right."

" You bet."

" For, the rest of it is as perfect as can be. Couldn't be better. If it all goes well, your success is assured."

" It will be up-hill work, I expect."

" Faint heart never won fair lady, you know."

" That's what they tell me. Well, we'll see how it goes."

After that their conversation became louder, and they talked in a general way about various things of little interest.

They had quite a while to wait before Witherton put in his appearance, and when he came, it could be told by any one at a glance that he was excited in mind.

The two boys knew him, of course, having seen him at the office, and he recognized them at sight.

He would have spoken to them first, but Harry gave him a quick signal, which he seemed to take in and understand readily, and at the same time the younger of the two men cried:

" Why, what's the matter with you, Witherton?"

" I'm a little excited, that's all," was the reply. " Good-morning, Mr. Robiston. I am just from the bank."

" They told me you had gone there, so I waited," said Robiston.

" But, I didn't get the money."

" Not?" surprised.

" No; for the reason that the bank has been robbed."

" What! Stiverson's bank robbed!"

So both the men exclaimed at once.

" Yes; and Willey has been arrested as the robber."

" Worse and worse!" exclaimed Robiston. " He can't be guilty, surely; there is some mistake."

" I don't know; the case against him looks dark, though he stoutly maintains he is innocent."

" Tell us all about it."

Happy Harry and Silent Seth pricked up their ears afresh, since a robbery case came right in their line, little thinking that their chief had hold of it already.

" Well, there is not a great deal to tell," said Witherton, " but of course it is full of interest. It appears the bank was entered last night, and the safe opened by some one having the combination and about twelve thousand dollars taken. It was discovered by the youngest clerk, who was the first at the office. He found the door of the office locked. A wire key, however, was found down in the pit under the windows. No one but Willey and Stiverson himself had the combination, and as Stiverson is at home sick in bed it certainly was not he. Somehow suspicion turned upon Willey, when the police came, and they found some of the money on him. He denies his guilt, but it looks bad, you see."

" And so you couldn't get my cash, eh?" said Robiston.

" No, for the reason that there was none on hand. It will be all right, however, after a little delay."

" Of course. I'm sorry for Willey, but,

ally, I am not so greatly surprised as I might be, knowing certain things as I do. He has been cutting a pretty high figure for some time."

"That so?"

"I have noticed that, too," said Horace, "but I wouldn't want it to get out, for I would not want to appear against him."

"Oh! nor I, either!" cried Robiston. "It was just a remark. I wouldn't tell it where it could get to the ears of the detectives, for it is no funeral of mine, as the pat saying is."

"Will it shut up the bank, do you think?" asked Horace.

"Oh, no; the man Jones is capable of running it, in the absence of Willey, and no doubt he will take hold."

"Well, I'm disappointed, but can wait," observed Robiston. "I'll drop in again to-morrow, Witherton. Are you going my way, Horace?"

Horace was, and they left the store together, when Witherton gave attention to Harry and Seth.

CHAPTER V.

HARRY AND SETH SLIP UP.

"Well, what brings you here?" he asked.

"We put our feet into it and had to wait till you came, to carry out our game, sir," answered Harry.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you see, the boss sent us here to size up the shop, so to say, and we made it our excuse to ask for him when we came in, and as he wasn't to be seen, and as you had gone out, we said we'd wait."

"I see. But, what did Mr. Weston think to gain by sending you here?"

"Anything we could pick up. He likes to begin a case by knowing all about it in the first place. He wanted to know all he could about Mr. Shyrock and his business, and the men he has in his employ. We have got about all the points we want, so we'll go."

"And what have you got?"

"Not much of anything, for a fact. But, say, Mr. Witherton—"

"Well?"

"Who were those men who were just here?"

"Why do you ask that? What have those men got to do with the case I have given your chief?"

"I ask because we want to know, that's all. Don't reckon they have got anything to do with the case, but we never let anything slip when we are on the lay for points."

"Well, one was Mr. Beaumont Robiston, and the other was Horace Shyrock, son of the missing man."

"We got onto his identity all right, but not t'other fellow's just as hard as we wanted to. What does he do for a living?"

"Which one?"

"T'other fellow."

"Nothing; he is a wealthy man."

"That's it, eh? Well, that's all, I guess, unless Seth here has something to inquire about."

Seth shook his head in the negative.

"You see," said Harry, "Seth is bashful, and I have to talk for both of us when we are out. Well, that's all, I guess, for this time. We'll pedestrianate, if you don't kick."

"Go or stay, just as you please. If Broadway Billy thinks there is anything to be gained by watching here, you are at liberty to camp right here for a week, if you want to. You won't find out anything further than I have told him, though, for there is nothing further to be found out."

"We agree with ye, boss. At the same time, though, no need to let on who we are or what our business was. We gave out that we wanted to see Mr. Shyrock on some special matter."

"All right, no one need know who you are. You heard what I said about the bank robbery just now, of course."

"Cert."

"Well, your boss has taken hold of that already."

"Whoop-eel! Is that so? Seth, here's a double case on hand, sure as you live. We may get some 'citemen' out of it yet."

Though Harry spoke enthusiastically he spoke in low tone.

"We'll never get anywhere or do anything," observed Seth, "if we stay here all day to the tune of your chin."

"The dumb speaks!" cried Harry. "Never speaks unless he has something to say, either. Guess he has said it this time. Well, come on, then, silent one, and I'll hustle so tall that you will have hard work to keep up with me."

Witherton smiled at Harry's playfulness, and no one else could guess what had passed.

Harry and Seth took their leave from the store.

"Where to now?" asked Seth.

"Back to the home base, I s'pose; don't see as we have any other lay."

"Why not drop around to that bank and see what we can pick up there in the interest of our chief, seeing that he has the case?"

"Bully! Just what we will do, and he'll find that we are wide awake, even if we do like to hug fast to the bed in the morning. We'll be up to him and he won't know it."

So, they bent their steps in the direction of Stiverson's banking office, and just as they arrived they saw a young woman entering hastily.

"Wonder who that is?" quoth Harry.

"Wait, and I'll run right up and ask her," responded Seth, dryly.

"Yes, do!"

They went on leisurely, however, and mounting the steps, entered the office, where they found a policeman on guard for some purpose or other.

The young woman was at the window talking excitedly to the man on the other side.

"And they have taken him to jail?" she demanded.

"They took him to the station, at any rate, Miss Stiverson," the clerk made response.

"How could they do that! I know that he is innocent, Mr. Jones! I know he could not do such a deed. I will go his bail, no matter what the amount is. They shall not hold him!"

"I think as you do, Miss Stiverson, that he is innocent," the clerk declared, "but the appearances against him are terrible. Some of the money was actually found in his overcoat pocket. And then, who else could know the combination? I am sorry for him, very sorry."

"The fact that money was in his pocket proves him innocent," the girl cried. "He is no fool, and he would not carry the cash with him, if he had taken it."

Happy Harry gave Seth a nudge at that, and whispered:

"Horse sense, Seth, every time."

Seth nodded.

"I have to agree with you," the clerk had to admit. "But, will the police look at it in the same light?"

"They shall be forced to recognize the truth, Mr. Jones! I will employ the very best detective talent in the city and have the matter sifted to the bottom."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Miss Stiverson. I am happy to inform you that Mr. Willey himself employed Mr. Weston, called Broadway Billy, the very first thing after the discovery."

"Further proof that he is guiltless!" the girl cried. "He would never have dared to invite the inspection of that young man, if guilty. I have read about him in the papers, and I consider him as good as the best. Oh! Vance is innocent, of course he is, and it is a shame that he has to suffer."

"Will Mrs. Stiverson be down to the office, miss?" the clerk asked.

"I can't tell you," was the reply. "I know nothing about her movements. She may be down."

"The reason I asked, I am taking full charge here, and would like to have her approval of my action, since I suppose it is impossible to trouble Mr. Stiverson with the matter."

"You are doing right, sir; do what you think is best."

With that the young woman hastened out and away, leaving the clerk and the officer gazing after her.

"Who is that?" the policeman asked. "Old Steve's daughter, I take it, from what I've heard said."

"His daughter, yes; and as fine a young lady as ever lived, too."

"Must have a liking for the young man, I should imagine."

"She has. What can I do for you, young gentlemen?"

This to Harry and Seth.

"Boss wants to know what's the amount of the loss here, sir," Harry declared, unblushing.

He had to say something and say it quickly, and that was what popped into his head first of all, so out it came.

"And who is your boss, as you call him?" the clerk asked.

"Mr. Robiston," answered Silent Seth, as promptly as Harry had done before.

He remembered what Robiston had said at the store about the money he expected that morning.

"What Mr. Robiston?" demanded the clerk.

"Mr. Beaumont Robiston," Harry quickly supplied, catching on.

"Oh! Well, tell him it is about twelve thousand. First time I knew he had any one in his employ, though."

"Just an errand, that's all," explained Harry.

"Why didn't you say so, then?"

"You didn't ask."

Harry and Seth were moving to the door, glad to get out of an awkward situation, when, to their consternation, the door opened and Beaumont Robiston himself confronted them.

He gave them a quick look immediately, remembering them as the lads he had seen so recently at the store.

Harry put his nerve right to the effort and said boldly:

"He says the loss is about twelve thousand, sir."

"What? What do you mean?"

"The man there says the loss is about twelve thousand. We were just returning to tell you."

"Confound it, are you crazy?" the man demanded. "See here, I want to know what it is you are trying to get through you, anyhow."

It had been Harry's plan to give this excuse for the benefit of the clerk and the police officer, and quickly get past the man and out, but now the way was blocked for them.

"Did you send them here, Mr. Robiston?" asked the clerk.

"No, of course not. Who says I did?"

"They do."

"Confound your impudence, then! What do you mean by it? What business have you to use my name? Here, officer, I have an idea that these lads will bear a little closer inspection."

"I begin to think so myself," the policeman agreed, stepping forward with his club ready for business. "Who and what are you, anyhow?"

"I can answer that now, straight," answered Harry. "We are a pair of the worst ninnies you ever saw. Take us and box us up somewhere, before the fool-killer finds us."

"We want a straight explanation out of you, that is what we want, and no foolishness about it," cried Robiston. "Mr. Jones, it may be that these lads know something about this robbery, and that they are here with no good intention now. I think the officer had better take them in."

CHAPTER VI.

AND HOW IT CAME OUT.

HARRY and Seth were in a dilemma.

Under his breath Harry was muttering all manner of imprecations against himself, but Seth was taking it as coolly as he took everything.

"That is what I think myself," admitted the officer, in response to what Mr. Robiston had said. "Young fellows, you are my prisoners, and you don't want to make any resistance."

"Where's your warrant?" asked Seth.

"Right here in this stick," was the reply to that.

"Maybe you had better go slow," warned Harry. "You might make a mistake."

"What we want is a straight explanation out of you," reiterated Mr. Robiston. "What business had you to come here and make use of my name?"

"I guess we had better give them the straight tip, don't you think so?" and Seth turned to Harry.

"I'd like to, straight from the shoulder, if I were only big enough to do it, and no other way," Harry growled, anything but "happy" just then.

"Take care!" warned the policeman, raising his club slightly. "You are a young rascal, that's what you are, and I'll have to deal with you as one, if you don't look out sharp."

"I'm no rascal, but a fit subject for the insane asylum. If you take me in, that is going to be my plea; crazy as a bedbug! Or, worse than that, a natural born howling idiot. Don't you think that's a straight tip, Seth?"

"I'm half inclined to believe you are a fool," growled Robiston. "But, come, explain quick, or this officer shall drag you in."

"Well, we'll tell you straight," said Seth.

"That's what we want."

"You are aware, I suppose, that Detective William Weston, known as Broadway Billy, is interested in this case."

"Thunder!" ejaculated Robiston. "You don't mean to say you boys are his two helpers, do you?"

"That is the long and the short of it, sir."

"See here, can you prove it?" demanded the policeman.

"Guess we can, boss," assured Harry, now, with his happy grin again on his face.

It amused him to note the change that had come over their foes at the mere mention of Broadway Billy's name.

"Prove it, then."

The two lads opened their vests, and there on the suspender of each was a badge that had been furnished them by Billy, badges telling what they were and referring to Billy as their patron.

"That seems to settle it, sir," said the policeman to Robiston, as he drew back. "I have no desire to meddle with Broadway Billy's team."

"Then you think their story is straight?"

"No doubt about it, I guess."

"If you doubt it, just come along with us to the office," suggested Harry,

"The boss will soon convince you," added Seth.

"Well, if that's the case, that you are his boys, of course that settles it; but, that don't explain why you used my name."

"Would you tumble if the house fell on you?" asked Harry.

"You may take a tumble under something less than that, if you don't have a care how you address a gentleman," growled Robiston, "even if you are Broadway Billy's cub. I don't believe he approves of your impudence."

"That's a fact, he don't," Harry acknowledged. "But, to answer your question: You see, we thought we'd get away from here without letting on who we were, and when the cashier there lighted upon us as he did we had to have some excuse off-hand, and I gave your name."

"And how did you know anything about me or my business?"

"Why, we heard you talking at the store, and knew you had expected to get a boodle here this morning."

"Yes, that's so; and, see here: Have you been following me around this morning for any purpose? Because if I thought you had I'd break every bone in your bodies, sure."

"What would we follow you for?"

"That's what it would puzzle anybody to guess. I merely asked you if you have been doing it."

"Why, no, certainly not; looks more like you are following us, don't it? We were at the store when you came in there, and we came here and here you walk in on us again."

"That's so; but, I have better business than following lads like you around town. It is plain that our meeting has been accidental, and it is all right, but you do not want to make use of my name again or you may get into trouble."

"All right, we'll take the hint."

"Well, now that we know who you are, what have you learned about the case?"

"Nothing."

"Which is equivalent to saying that you would not tell if you had."

"You can take it that way if you want to, but it is the fact all the same, this time."

"By they way, young men," spoke up the clerk behind the partition, "does your employer know that Mr. Willey has been arrested?"

"Don't know," answered Harry; "haven't seen him for an hour or more."

"Look here, then," cried Robiston, "how did you know he had this case at all? And it is mighty certain that he didn't send you here himself. I'm not satisfied yet that you are what you claim."

"Come with us to the office, then," Seth requested.

"No; you answer my question, that is all. How did you know your chief had the case?"

"You are talking through your hat," cried Harry, disdainfully. "We might tell you any ghost story, and you would have to believe it or look further for proof. I'll give you the facts, though."

"That's what I want out of you."

"Well, didn't we hear Witherton telling you all about it at the store? And if Broadway Billy hadn't a hand in it we knew he'd ought to have, so we came right here to pick up anything we happened to find lying around loose; that is, in the way of a clue. See?"

The fact was, Witherton had told them after Robiston had gone out, but there was no need to give him details; the less so, since that had first been in their minds anyhow.

"You needn't look for further proof, sir," spoke up the policeman. "That is just the tune of Broadway Billy and his Beagles, every time."

"I guess you are right," Robiston agreed. "The only thing is, they must not use my name again."

"We'll take care not to, sir," said Seth.

And with that he and Harry left the office,

leaving the others to think and say what they pleased.

"Seth, I want to be kicked," said Harry, as soon as they were a little way from the building.

"And you deserve to be," responded Seth, soberly.

"Why?"

"Why do you want to be?"

"For shooting my mouth off too quick, that's what."

"And that's just what you deserve it for, too. It would have been all right, though, if Robiston hadn't dropped in as he did."

"But he did drop, and so it was all wrong. But, Seth, do you know that I am of the mind that the fellow isn't as clean inside as he looks on the outside?"

"That so?"

"Fact."

Seth waited for the explanation, and it came at once.

"That's jest what I do think," Harry declared, stoutly. "There was no reason for his thinking we were after him, and if he hadn't had a sore on his conscience he wouldn't 'a' felt it touch him. See?"

"It looks that way, Harry."

"Christopher Columbia! Should say it does! May be nothing in it, but I'll bet he needs watching."

Seth stopped short.

"What's up?" asked Harry, in the same breath.

"If you think he needs watching, now is the time to take up the trail and do it."

"You are right, as you always are. Which shall do it?"

"Toss up a cent to see."

"Up it goes."

"Head!"

And head it came down, and Seth was elected, so to say.

"Just your luck," cried Harry. "Well, go for him and see how much of him is gold and how much brass. I'll go to the office and wait for the boss."

Seth was already adjusting a mustache to his lip, and that done, he put on a pair of eyeglasses and his disguise was complete enough to answer the purpose.

It did not seem possible that so great a change could be made by so little alteration.

"Am I right?" he asked.

"Yes; wouldn't know you if I met you in a dark alley on a dark night," Harry made answer.

Seth said no more, probably thinking he had been giving too much play to his tongue as it was, but set off at once in the direction from which they had just come.

"Well, he corked up mighty sudden, anyhow," muttered Harry, as he gazed after him. "That fellow is a queer one, no mistake. Wish I had his weight of brain, though. He's got the real stuff in his head."

Harry continued on his way, after that, and in due time was at the office.

Broadway Billy was not there yet, but somebody else was, that is to say, was waiting at the door.

The personage was a young woman, one who was rather good looking, and who appeared to be slightly nervous in her manner. She eyed Harry closely as he approached the door.

"Do you belong here?" she asked, when Harry unlocked the door.

"Yes, ma'm," was the response. "Waiting to see Mr. Weston, ma'm?"

"Yes. Can you tell me when he will be in?"

"Expect him at any moment. Will you come in and wait for him?"

"Yes; for it is quite important that I should see him as soon as possible."

She entered and took a chair, and there they waited in silence for the coming of the chief, Happy Harry eager to learn what the new case might be.

CHAPTER VII.

BILLY REAPS RICHLY.

In the mean time Broadway Billy, conversing with Horace Shyrock, had gone with him to his place of business.

He had endeavored to get something out of the young man that would serve him as a clue, but had been unable to do so. It was evident that Horace knew no more about his father's secret business than any one else.

When they arrived at Horace's store, Billy was invited in, and accepted, for he wanted to size up the young man leisurely.

His first opinion of him had not been flatter-

ing, and he was willing to give him the benefit of a doubt.

Billy was shown into the young man's private office, and Horace excused himself.

He was not gone long, and when he returned, said:

"Now, Mr. Weston, I am at leisure, and am ready to answer as many questions as you want to put to me."

"Well, sir, I have asked a good many already," responded Billy, "but have not been repaid for the pains. It is clear that you are as much in the dark as I am myself, so far."

"I guess you are right in saying that."

"You have said you are not aware that your father had an enemy; that you do not know anything of his secret movements; and in fact, nothing about him that is not known to everybody else who knew him at all well."

"That is about the size of it."

"I suppose you remember well enough when your father opened his branch store in Philadelphia?"

"Ob, yes."

"It was about twelve years ago?"

"Yes, about that long, if I remember right."

"Can you recall persons who were your father's most intimate friends at that time?"

"Going away back there to strike the trail, eh?"

"I see you readily guess my purpose. Yes, that is my idea, for it has only been since about that time he has been absenting himself from home."

"And you think you can find the beginning of the motive? Well, you may be right, but I am afraid you have come to the wrong person to get your start. You know I was only a boy then."

"Yes, I know, but some boys at twelve are not by any means idiots."

"Well, I can recall a few friends whom my father had at that time, but some of them are dead now."

"Name them."

"There was Judge Grow, now dead; and Mr. Henry Wade, whereabouts unknown; and John Davids, dead; and—and—Gaffner Stiverson, the banker now. That's about all I can bring to mind."

"Gaffner Stiverson, eh?"

"Yes. I know they used to be very friendly, and I suppose they are so still, or were before father disappeared."

"Do the two families visit?"

"No; it was nothing more than a business friendship, I guess; favors done for each other at different times."

"Then it is possible, were Stiverson well, that he would be able to throw a little light upon the matter."

"Very likely he could tell you something that might help you."

"Then I must make it my business to see him when he can be seen at all, if I cannot learn in any other way. Well, I won't trouble you further, Mr. Shyrock, or you will tire of me."

"No danger of that; call again, Mr. Weston; and, if anything turns up, I'll let you know at once."

A few more words, and Billy took his leave.

He had gained his object, namely, to get the name of some one with whom Mr. Shyrock had been intimate in the old time.

It was unfortunate for the case that Mr. Stiverson was sick, but yet fortunate that Billy had another case on hand in which he had interest. It would probably give him opportunity to see the man as soon as well enough.

When he reached the office he found Harry and the young woman there.

He glanced around for Seth, but made no inquiry for him before this stranger, and Harry quickly said:

"This, madam, is Mr. Weston."

Billy made her a bow, with the remark:

"Did you want to see me?"

"Yes, sir, if you are the gentleman called Broadway Billy."

"That is my handy name," Billy admitted, with a smile.

"And it was you who were recently at Mrs. Shyrock's?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am Miss Shyrock. I did not see you, but mamma told me you had been there."

"Then you have come with some news of your missing father?"

"No, not so, but on another matter entirely. You have heard of the robbery of Mr. Stiverson's bank?"

"Yes."

"And that his chief clerk has been arrested?"

"Yes."

"Well, I want to engage you to take that case in hand, for me, and prove the innocence of Vance Willey."

Billy felt surprise, but did not show it.

Happy Harry thought to himself that the chief clerk must have a strong grip upon the fair sex, this being the second young lady interested in his cause.

"Can you tell me anything that will be likely to help me in that task?" the young chief asked.

"Not a thing; but, I do know that he has foes who would not hesitate to do him harm if they could."

"And you call that nothing?"

"Well, that is only a suspicion that may amount to nothing."

"Nevertheless it is something. Who are these persons whom you have in mind?"

"One is Beaumont Robiston and the other is my own brother, Horace Shyrock. I hate to mention him, but I have good reason for doing so."

"What is that reason?"

"Well, he is Mr. Willey's rival for the hand of Miss Stiverson, whom they both love."

"But, surely you cannot think that your brother would go to such length, can you? Besides, think of the crime with which Mr. Willey is charged."

"It is just that that makes me take the action I do."

"What is your interest in Mr. Willey?"

"Must I tell you that?"

"It were better to do so. The more fully I understand a case the better are my chances for success."

"Then I will tell you. It is because I love him."

"Whew! Now this is growing interesting, sure enough. You love him, but he loves Miss Stiverson."

"Yes, that is true."

"Then you and she are rivals."

"I suppose so."

"But, where does Beaumont Robiston come in?"

"You see, he knows I love Willey, and he himself has been trying to win my hand but has been refused."

"I see, I see; it is as good as a romance."

"It is a serious matter for me, Mr. Weston. I would never have made such disclosures to you, were it not that I think a full understanding of the situation may be helpful to you."

"You have thought aright, too. Are you aware of one thing, however?"

"What is that?"

"That, by what you have said, you have opened the way for suspicion in this robbery case to fall upon your brother and Mr. Robiston, provided we find Mr. Willey to be innocent?"

"I cannot help where it may fall. Let the guilty one suffer. Of course, I do not believe either of them had a hand in that, mind you; I cannot think that of them; but, they are no friends to Mr. Willey, and if they can use his misfortune against him they will do it."

"Then, your only reason for thinking Mr. Willey innocent is because you love him and want to save him."

"No, no; I know him well, and I know he is a man of honor."

"And, by helping him in his time of need you hope to turn his affection to yourself."

"I cannot deny it."

"Well, let me inform you, Miss Shyrock, that I have taken hold of the case already—"

"What! You have already taken it? Then it was you who arrested him! Then you believe him guilty! And yet you allowed me to go on and tell you—"

"Hold on, pray," Billy interrupted gently. "You are wronging me. It was not I who made the arrest, but the police; I am of the opinion the young man is innocent, and was going to try to prove him so."

"Oh, then I beg your pardon, sir. I was too hasty."

"That is all right. Now, that you have told me so much, can you tell me anything more?"

"I hardly think so."

"Your brother and this man Robiston are friends, I take it."

"Yes; and it were better for Horace had he never met this rascal. I call him so, because I know he is such."

"What do you know about him?"

"For one thing, that he is on too friendly terms with the young wife of Mr. Stiverson; and, more than that, I have a suspicion that he has a wife somewhere."

"What do you know about Mr. Witherton?"

"Mr. Witherton? Oh, I think he is a good and honest man, sir."

"You know nothing against him, eh?"

"Nothing."

"And tell me, can you give me any help toward the finding of your father?"

"No, no; would that I could. But you have changed the subject. Will you do all you can for Mr. Willey?"

"Yes, I will do all I can for him. On your part, keep very quiet, and do not let it be known that you have been telling me so much. Let no one suspect that I know what I do."

"I understand, sir. Trust me."

CHAPTER VIII.

SCORING MORE POINTS.

A LITTLE further talk, and the woman took her leave.

No sooner gone, than Happy Harry proceeded to stand upon his head in the middle of the office.

"Hello! what's the matter with you?" asked Billy.

"That's the way I feel," Harry answered, leaping lightly from his hands to his feet. "Christopher Columbia! I don't know whether I'm on my head or my feet, anyhow."

"You act that way, that's true."

"Crackers an' cheese! that don't half express it, boss. If I could stand on the tip of one ear and fan myself with the other, then I would be doing something. We are on the trail of big game this time, and don't you forget it. And that fellow Willey is a dead masher."

"What do you mean? Where is Seth?"

"Hold on, boss, don't tangle me up; one question at a time, always. I'll respond to the second one first. Seth is on the track of the Beaumont Robiston this gal mentioned, and he's loaded for bear, too, you bet. Oh! there is a son o' Ham in the woodpile some's, and we are going to have him if we have to sit up all night to get him. Selah!"

"Seth is shadowing Beaumont Robiston, you say?"

"Sure, Mike."

"How did he strike his trail?" And what is he following him for?"

"There you go again, two questions more, and I haven't answered but one of the other pair yet. You are bound to get me rattled, if you don't look out, and then I won't know where I'm at. Let's see, where am I at, anyhow? By the way, that's a great gag—where am I at, isn't it, boss? I know a fellow that says it's as common as dish-water across in Pennsylvania 'mong the Dutch there. Newspapers must have thought they had struck a new thing—"

"Stop right there, Harry. If I let you rattle on at this rate I'll never get anything out of you. If I talked at your rate when I was a boy, it's a wonder I ever lived to grow up. Now, let's get right down to it. What did you mean by saying Willey is a dead masher?"

"Choked me off, didn't ye. Well, that's all right. We'll get down to it, as you call it. I mean he's a dead masher because there is another gal as dead gone on him as this one seems to be."

"That so? Who is the other one?"

"Miss Stiverson."

"Ha!"

"You bet."

"Well, what do you mean by saying we are on the trail of big game?"

"Don't mean anything I didn't say, boss; that's about the size of it, I have a notion. We think Robiston is a bad one, though we haven't got anything scored up against him yet."

"Well, now, answer my last questions. How did you get on his track? and what is Seth following him for?"

"That's it, that's the way to keep me on the track. Well, you see, we fell in with him at Shyrock's store, and there we heard about the robbery and that you had taken a hand in the game. We didn't pick up much about the other case, so we thought we'd drop around to the bank and see if we couldn't do something there. See! Well, we went to the bank, and there Robiston walked in on us again, and it came around so that he accused us of following him."

But, Harry rattled on until he had given Billy all the details of his and Seth's doings.

"I'm glad Seth is looking after him, then," Billy remarked, when he had done. "After what this girl has said, there may be something more in your suspicions than you had any idea of."

"I think so myself. I'm sorry that cent didn't fall t'other side up, though, for Seth is having all the 'citements."

"Never mind, Harry, I'll put you on another lay."

"What's that?"

"You can go and play the shadow on Horace Shyrock. If Robiston is in it, so is he, and one is probably as bad as the other."

"That's the stuff! I'm not happy unless I'm on the hustle, boss, and the taller the hustle the better I like it. I'll sift his ashes for him, you bet. The jeebeeb hath spoken. Selah!"

"It looks like a case that is going to amount to something, Harry, so don't slip up in it."

"Won't if I can help it. Now I'll disguise and be off."

"Yes, disguise well, for he has seen you."

Billy lent his assistance in fixing Harry's make-up, and when the lad left the office he was not to be recognized.

"Yes, it is a curious case," Billy mused to himself, when alone. "And it has the appearance of tryin' to tangle itself up in a double hard knot, too. It began with the missing Mr. Shyrock, and now where is it? I give it up—No, I don't, either; that would never do; I must untangle it, with the help of my team."

Leaving the office, he went again to Stiver's son's bank.

The policeman was still there.

"What are you doing here?" Billy quietly asked, stepping up to him.

"What is it to you, young fellow?" the officer demanded, surveying him in a critical way.

The two were strangers.

"It is nothing to me, or I would not ask. I'm Billy Weston, Broadway Billy, and I have a finger in this pie."

"Oh! that alters the case. Why, I'm here by request of the clerk there, who does not feel like taking the responsibility all on his own shoulders to-day, or at any rate not till he gets his grip on matters."

"I see."

"Say, were those your boys who were here?"

"Yes, guess they were."

"Nervy lads, they."

"Some."

Billy exchanged some further remarks with the officer, and then stepped to the window to talk with the clerk in charge.

"Has anything new turned up?" he asked of him.

"Nothing, sir, unless you have not heard of the arrest of Willey."

"I have heard of that. What do you think about his case? Do you think he is guilty?"

"Tell you, Mr. Weston, I hate to think so, and that's the truth."

"But it looks bad against him, eh?"

"Exactly."

"Tell me about it. How came about his arrest?"

"Why, the police detective who came here with the officers took hold with a snap, and arrested him right off, on suspicion. Willey protested, but that was no use, and finding he had to go along, asked Jack for his overcoat, and as Jack was getting it a package of bills fell out of one of the pockets.

"Ha!"

"And that's not the worst of it. The police detective searched the coat and found two other packages there, and a ticket by the Central for Canada."

"Whew!"

"What do you think of that?" asked the policeman.

"It looks bad, on the face of it," Billy declared.

"They seem to have a case."

"Don't seem as if there is much use of looking further, does it?"

"No, that's so. Say, Jack," turning to the youth, "that package of money was not in the pocket very securely I guess, was it?"

That young gentleman turned just a shade pale as he responded:

"N—no, sir, should think not, sir. It fell out just when I took the coat down off the hook."

"Well, you needn't get frightened about it, just because a detective not much older than yourself is talking to you."

"Oh! I ain't scared, sir."

"Of course not. Do you know how much money was in that package, Mr. Jones?" turning back to him.

"Five hundred dollars, sir."

"And in the other packages?"

"The same."

"Fifteen hundred dollars, then, and a ticket to Canada, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, now, don't you think that is a little bit ridiculous? The amount missing is said to be about twelve thousand dollars."

"They think he had the rest of it somewhere."

"Why did he not have this and the ticket with the bulk of it, then?"

"That's so, it does look queer; I hadn't thought of it that way at all. It is funny."

"Then you think he is innocent?" asked the officer.

"Yes, I do," Billy asserted.

"Might be not have had this small sum by him just for ready money, and maybe sent the rest on ahead of him."

"Possible, but not probable. It looks to me like a put-up job on him."

"You don't say!"

"Yes, I do."

"Who could 'a' done that?"

"Oh, I don't pretend to say that; it's only a suspicion."

Billy was looking sharply at the man Jones, but had to believe him innocent. His face had only a look of innocent surprise. And the boy Jack, he was still slightly pale, so that need not signify anything important.

"I never knew Willey had a foe in the world," said Jones, "and even if he had, how could he open the bank, and least of all, the safe? That is the sticker."

"That is one of the points to be found out. But, if Willey had intended robbing the safe and skipping for Canada, would he not have taken the money and got away as quickly and as quietly as possible?"

"That does look more reasonable, come to think of it," the policeman admitted, as did Jones.

"The fact of the matter is, the plotter has overreached himself," Billy added.

"Well, I hope you are right, and that you can prove him innocent," Jones declared, earnestly.

"It remains to be seen," rejoined Billy. "By the way, officer, who was the detective who was here and took charge of the case?"

The policeman gave his name, and with his new items of information Billy took his leave. He had a suspicion in mind that Master Jack was in the plot.

CHAPTER IX.

SETH STRIKES A SNAG.

SILENT SETH lost no time in getting back to the neighborhood of the bank.

In truth, he had not left the neighborhood, so that word hardly fits; but no matter.

He and Harry had come away only a short distance, not more than a few blocks, and he was back again in a few minutes.

A little later, however, would have been too late, for his man was just leaving the bank when he got there, and Seth saw him look carefully up and down the street as he came down the steps.

Seth kept right on toward him at a moderate gait.

The man favored him with a passing glance as he paused at the last step, but immediately turned and went away.

The Silent Shadower kept on after him, as though he had no aim in view in his walk, yet appearing to pay no attention to anything as he passed along.

Robiston's destination was the Stiverson mansion.

Seth managed his game so well that he followed him all the way without arousing a suspicion, as he believed.

There he was done, though, for think as he would he could devise no plan by which to gain entrance to learn anything of the man's business there.

Robiston was in the house about half an hour.

When he reappeared Seth had changed his disguise enough to escape detection as the same person the man had seen when leaving the bank, and was successful in keeping his man in sight to the store of Horace Shyrock.

On the way there he had made up his mind to one thing, and that was, that he had not performed much work of any value thus far.

What would it benefit his chief to know merely that Robiston had paid a visit to the Stiverson mansion?

He was determined, if possible, to learn more at the next place of destination.

When he saw his man enter the store, he thought:

"Well, there he has gone, and how am I going to carry out my resolve? If I go in there I'll have to have an excuse for doing so, and what will it be?"

That puzzled him.

While trying to hatch up something that would answer the purpose he had gone on leisurely to the store.

He turned in, without having as yet made up his mind to anything definite, and as he did so a card in one of the windows caught his eye.

"SHIPPING CLERK WANTED."

He had it!

Entering boldly he looked around him in his ever cool and calm manner, taking note of everything to be seen.

He saw Robiston and Horace Shyrock talking together a little at one side, and knew their conversation had but fairly begun, since Robiston had entered only a minute or so ahead of him.

He was not left long alone to reflect, for a clerk came forward to him.

"Something I can do for you?" he asked.

"Do you want a shipping clerk?" asked Seth in return.

"Yes," was the rejoinder. "Do you want the job?"

"Thought I'd see about it."

"Very well, that gentleman there is the proprietor; he will attend to you as soon as he is at leisure."

"All right."

The clerk left Seth with that, and Seth moved slowly over in the direction of where Robiston and young Shyrock were standing.

He was looking at the goods displayed as he did so, and it would have been hard for any one there to have guessed his real object. Seth was careful when on a case.

It was not long ere he was near enough to hear what was being said.

"The same boys?" he heard Horace question.

"Yes, the same."

"It does look queer, that's the fact."

"And it is just so queer that I am uneasy about it, I tell you that."

"Don't see why you need be."

"Maybe I wouldn't, if it was anybody else but Broadway Billy."

"Then you own you are afraid of him?"

"I do."

"You are getting frightened before you are hurt. What harm can he do you, I should like to know?"

"So would I, too. You know what that fellow is, the very devil at springing surprises, and that is what makes me uneasy about it. How is it he is mixed up in things so soon?"

"My belief is that you are needlessly alarmed. Maybe the story the lads told was straight."

"Maybe it was; it is the uncertainty that troubles me."

"Well, I don't mean to go into mourning till somebody dies, that is sure; you may do as you please about it."

"We must see the young fellow as soon as we can."

"Why?"

"He looks weak and will need bracing up."

"Don't think he will blow out, do you?"

"No, maybe not that; but it wouldn't take much pulling to draw him out or much of a scare to scare him out, either."

"That must not be allowed. We'll meet him promptly at the time and place we named, and give him something to put in his pocket to lend him courage. Too bad we had to use him."

"You are right; but his own safety will make it necessary for him to keep a still tongue."

Just then Horace observed Seth.

"What do you want, young fellow?" he demanded.

Seth turned himself around in his slow way and looked at the questioner.

"Speak to me?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, I see by the sign in the window that you want a shipping clerk."

"And you want the job?"

"That's according to—"

"To what?"

"What there is in it."

"Oh! Well, sit down there, and I'll talk with you presently."

He indicated a chair that was a little further away than where Seth had been standing, so the Silent Shadower learned no more from their conversation then.

What he did note, however, was that Robiston cast a glance in his direction now and again, and he half feared that he had been recognized. That suspicion, however, was presently brushed away.

The two men finally shook hands, and Robiston took his leave.

Shyrock then turned to Seth, saying:

"Now, sir, come with me into the office and I'll talk with you about the position."

Seth rose and followed him.

When they entered the little office young Shy-

rock closed the door but did not latch it, leaving it about an inch ajar.

The Silent Shadower noted it, but thought nothing of it.

It was probably his way of leaving the door, he thought, and thought nothing further about it.

"Now, then, what is your name?" the young merchant asked.

"Mart Sethin, sir."

"How old?"

"Twenty."

"You look young, even with a mustache."

"Twenty isn't very old."

"That's true. Well, what experience have you had?"

"None."

Seth wanted to be refused the place as quickly as possible. He wanted to be off after Robiston, to take up the trail again.

He would have followed him from the store at once, but to have done so, he thought, would have been to arouse the suspicions of young Shyrock, and that he did not want to do.

"What!" the young merchant exclaimed. "You come to get a place in a line of business you know nothing about!"

"Everybody has to learn, sir, and I thought I could pick it up pretty quick, as your store is not a big one. If you don't want me, though, I'll go—"

The door opened and Robiston stepped in.

Silent Seth felt at once that he was in for it, that he had been recognized after all.

Robiston closed the door after him, and secured it.

"Well, what have you got to say this time?" he demanded, looking keenly at Silent Seth.

"I don't know what you mean, sir," Seth responded, blankly, as cool as ice in his manner.

"That won't go down, sonny, for I know you," cried the other. "You can't fool me again."

Seth looked at Shyrock in a wondering way.

"What does he mean?" he asked.

"I guess he'll tell you fast enough," was the stern, grim answer.

"Yes, I will tell you," cried Robiston. "I mean that you are one of Broadway Billy's cubs, and that I mean to know why you are shadowing me."

Seth was now upon his feet, but there was no chance for escape.

"Are you crazy, sir? or am I dreaming?" he asked, in the most puzzled manner he could assume.

"I begin to believe it is a mistake, Beaumont," young Shyrock spoke up.

Seth's playing had convinced him.

"Well, you can bet I'm going to be sure before I lose him," cried the other, showing he had a doubt himself.

He stepped forward, and before Seth could guess his intention had laid hold upon his false mustache and pulled it sharply, and it came off in his hand.

"Ha! what did I tell you?" he cried.

"That was a pretty quick shave, anyhow," observed Seth, quietly.

The two men confronted him menacingly, but the cool lad did not show the least degree of alarm.

CHAPTER X.

HARRY AND SETH DISHED.

WHEN Happy Harry left the office with his latest commission, he set off in the direction of Horace Shyrock's store.

This was a case that was not proving exciting enough to suit his taste, but he was determined to get all the interest out of it that was to be had, at the same time doing his best work in Billy's behalf.

"Christopher Columbia!" he exclaimed to himself by the way, "I wish something would turn up to make 'er whoop. It would be a relief to get into a consarned diffikiltiy, if notbin' more. S'pose it would be a relief to get out again, too; it 'most always is."

He was in disguise, as we know, but all the same when he drew near to his destination he began to use caution.

Glancing at the numbers, he picked out the store before he came to it.

As he drew nearer a sudden surprise was sprung upon him, or sprung itself upon him—to be exact.

Beaumont Robiston came out of the store and turned down the street toward the avenue from which Harry had just come, and a meeting seemed certain.

Harry felt secure from recognition, and kept steadily on.

At the same time he was looking around for

In, for, finding Robiston here, he knew the Silent Shadower could not be far away, unless he had missed his game.

Seth was not to be seen then, however, as we know, so he looked in vain, and not seeing him, gave his attention quietly to the suspect, who was now upon him but who did not notice him.

They had almost met when Robiston stopped short, as though he had forgotten something, and retraced his steps, thus bringing Harry in, following close upon his heels.

The man turned into the store again, and there was nothing for Harry to do but to keep straight on, which he did.

When he had gone a little distance he looked back.

The man was out of sight.

"Well, guess he didn't tumble to me, anyhow," the lad told himself. "And I don't see how he could, either, for I hardly know who I am. Crackers an' cheese! wonder where that deaf and dumb pard of mine is! Should think he'd orter be 'round here some'rs. But mebbe he has failed to connect, so I reckon I'd better take hold and see what's to be found out. Reckon I'll 'ply for that position; I see they want a clerk of some sort."

With that in mind he turned and went back to the store and entered.

This was about the time when Seth stood forth unmasked before the two men in the private office.

"Who would have dreamed it?" exclaimed young Shyrock.

"What did I tell you?" demanded Robiston.

"It looks like it now, sure enough."

"And what's to be done?"

"Give it up."

Silent Seth stood calmly by awaiting their decision in his case.

"Curse you!" and Robiston turned upon him fiercely; "what do you mean by it, anyhow?"

"Mean by what?" Seth quietly asked.

"You know well enough what. What do you mean by playing the spy upon me?"

"Can you prove that I have been doing that?"

"Prove it, hang you! what more proof is wanted?"

"I don't know; how much have you got?"

"But you are a cool one. Wasn't you at the bank when I was there? and now are you not here? I wasn't at the bank ten minutes, and came from there here—yes, I came from there here."

"I didn't, and that's the difference."

"Where did you go first, then?"

"Don't know that I need to tell that; I made a change of disguise and took up a new thread."

"Then you mean to say you met here by chance?"

"Looks so, don't it?"

"No, I'll be hanged if it does. I believe you have been following me, and I am going to punish you as you deserve."

"Better go slow till you are sure you are right," Seth quietly warned. "You might put your foot in it if you don't watch out where you step. When you punish me you strike Broadway Billy."

"Well, then, if you didn't follow me here, what brought you here?"

"Don't see that I'm bound to answer your questions."

"You'll see something you won't want to see, if you don't answer them, mind you that."

"If you have so much suspicion that I'm after you, you can come along with me to the office, and the boss will tell you what I'm here for. You must have some reason to fear a detective, haven't you?"

Robiston lifted his fist as if he would strike the lad to the floor, but he thought better of it.

"I ought to knock you down for such an insult to a gentleman. And, let me warn you here and now, if I meet you again under suspicious circumstances, I will do it, too."

"Then I hope we won't meet, sir."

At that juncture some one tried the door. Shyrock opened it, and into the office stepped Happy Harry in his disguise.

Of course Silent Seth recognized him immediately, having seen the same disguise often before.

"Well?" young Shyrock sharply interrogated. "Guess I'm too late for the job, by the looks of things," Harry observed, as he looked around.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, you have a card up that a clerk's wanted here, but I s'pose this chap has got the job. He looks sort o' guilty."

With a sudden movement Robiston stepped forward and made a grab at Harry's head, snatching off the wig he had on, hat and all, un-

masking him as completely as he had done for Seth.

"Christopher Columbia!" cried Harry. "Don't you know any better'n that? I guess you don't know what good manners are, do ye? Where was you brought up, anyhow? How would you like for me to do that ter you? Don't you do the same with my other hair, or somethin' will drop. The jeejeeb hath spoken. Selah!"

"You see," cried Robiston, turning to Shyrock, "here are both of them, and I know there is something in the wind. I'd like to know what it is. If they are following me for any purpose they are playing on the wrong harp, that is a dead open-and-shut. And I want to tell you as I have just told your partner, young fellow," to Harry, "if I run up against you again something is going to happen."

"Crackers an' cheese!" cried Harry. "Ain't somethin' allus happenin'? That is what makes the world jog along the way it does. You once let things stop happenin', and see where we'll come to. It is the unexpected that's allus happenin', too. Who'd a' thought when I came in here to 'ply for a job that I was going to lose my scalp? I didn't, you bet. There are more strange things in the world than you ever dreamed of, and this was one. But, say, what has got it into your head so hard that we are follerin' you?"

"You have no need to ask that; it shows for itself. Don't let this happen again, that's all."

"Christopher Columbia! as if I could help what happens."

"See here," spoke up Horace.

"Well?"

"You both say you didn't follow Mr. Robiston?"

"That's what I say, anyhow," Harry declared. "S'pose Seth has spoke for himself."

"Well, if you did not follow him, and have not been following him, what has brought you here in this manner? It looks as though you are shadowing me."

"Pretty good guess," said Harry, cheerfully.

"What! you mean to say you are?"

"We came here to look around your store, anyhow; next thing to it."

"And what was that for? Seems to me you are making yourselves pretty fresh, don't you?"

"We are only carrying out orders, that's all. But, maybe you wouldn't want me to speak right out before this gentleman here."

"Yes, you can speak right out before him. I am bound to know what has brought you here, now that he is done with you. Give me your story, and give me it straight as a stick, too."

"Well, you've got it."

"No, I haven't; I want to know why you are here."

Harry had exchanged a signal with Seth, and knew the way was all clear for him to forge ahead.

"Well, if you want it told out, all right. We are trying to get some clew to your missing dad, that's all."

"Thunder! Do you think you will learn anything here?"

"We don't think anything about that, we are here to pick up anything that may turn up, that's all. What we are after is clews, hard and fast; fee?"

Harry's grammar was faulty but his meaning was plain enough.

"And your chief sent you here?"

"Sure, Mike."

"Well, you can go back to him and tell him for me that he is taking a mighty poor course for finding out anything about my missing father. I don't see what he is thinking about; do you, Beau?"

"No, hang me if I do, but it looks straighter than it did."

"And you think they have told the truth?"

"Yes, I think so, now."

"Well, youngsters, have you found out anything?" turning to Harry and Seth.

"Crackers an' cheese!" cried Harry. "Haven't you yanked me up so quick that I couldn't learn anything? Now if you had given me that job and allowed me to nose around for six months or a year, then I'd been better able to report."

"Six months or a year?"

"Yes; not a day less. If I had brain, you see, it would be different, but I haven't. Here is Seth, now, he could have done it in a minute. I suppose he has got onto the facts, if you gave him half a show."

Seth smiled in a weakly way, and shook his head.

"Well, you may go back to your chief," said Shyrock, "and tell him for me that he has done a foolish thing. I know nothing about my father, and he will never be able to solve the mystery if he fools away time in this fashion.

If he can't do any better he might as well give the case up first as last."

"And tell him for me," added Robiston, "that if his two cubs cross my path again he will have to lay them up for repairs. Don't forget it."

CHAPTER XI.

SEALED GUESSES.

HAPPY HARRY and Silent Seth took their departure in something of a crestfallen manner.

Their detective pride had suffered a fall, and they felt correspondingly dejected, though there was nothing in the manner of phlegmatic Seth to betray it.

"Christopher Columbia!" cried Happy Harry in anything but a happy tone, as soon as they had shaken the dust of the office from their feet, so to express it; "but that was a drop. What happened us, anyhow?"

"There is nothing the matter," Seth declared.

"Crackers an' cheese! Nothin' the matter? Why, we have been picked up for a pair of the most gushing gillies you ever heard of, and the case proved against us. I tell you what it is, Seth, I'm going to 'ply for a posh on the street-cleaning brigade. I think the caliber of my brain will just fit such a job as that."

Seth, with nothing to say, said nothing.

Harry always had to draw him out by main force, when no vital point was under consideration.

"Why don't ye say somethin'?" he now demanded. "If you don't talk, bless me if I don't take up a pavin' stone and see what's in that sealed-up head of yours. You say there is nothing the matter, yet here we are going back to the office like a pair of kicked kloodles, knocked out in the first round. I'm shamed to face the boss, and that's the truth in a solid chunk. He'll take away our badges, sure."

"You needn't worry, you are safe."

"Hello! can talk, can't you? What do you mean, though?"

"Why, you would have been all right, if I hadn't been in for it when you got there."

"Don't know 'bout that; seems to me I am always getting into it, whether I want to or not. But how did you come to fall over yourself so bad?"

"Easy enough. Robiston suspected me, and made up his mind to find out whether his suspicion was well grounded or not. If he had been mistaken and pulled a sure-enough mustache like he yanked my false one, somebody would have yelled, you bet!"

"And having got onto your graft, they were ready for me when I came along, I see. Then it was your fault, eh? I've a notion to take you out there in the middle of the street and scour your buttons for you, Seth."

"It's a question whether you could do it or not, Harry."

"We'll settle that question some time."

So they talked on, bringing out the points of the case as it now appeared to them, and in due time were at the office.

They were about to enter, when Harry caught sight of a person whom he recognized, and to whom he called Seth's attention. It was Jack, the junior clerk at the bank.

He was passing up the street on the opposite side, and seemed to be in a hurry.

"Where's he going to?" questioned Harry.

"One way to find out," Seth suggested.

"By following him, eh?"

"Exactly."

"Well, which does it fall to?"

"I'd like to report to the boss what I heard between Robiston and Shyrock."

"A wink is just as good as a nod to a blind man, and I savvy. I'll try to hunt his baze for him."

Harry was off at once, and Seth entered the building and mounted the steps to the office, where he found their chief, who had come in just a little ahead of him.

"Back again, eh?" greeted Billy.

"I've got a point or two," said Seth, wasting no words idly.

"That's good; what are they?"

Seth reported.

"Ha! now we are coming at something," cried Billy. "You and Harry are right in your suspicions. Where is Harry?"

"Just saw that fellow Jack, and followed him."

"Good again. I think that chap is in this thing deeper than will be wholesome for him."

"Well, what is going to be done?"

"Can't do anything yet. Must get the proofs, you know."

"And how are we going to do that? Robiston has his eyes wide open now."

"I see he has, Seth; but we must try to close them for him. I've another lay for you."

"What is it?"

"Want you to go to Stiverson's."

"The house?"

"Yes."

"All right, just give me the plan."

"This man Robiston and Mrs. Stiverson, who is a young woman, are said to be rather too friendly for good report. They may have a hand in this thing together, in some manner."

"That's so. It wouldn't surprise me, after what I heard."

"Your report has strengthened the suspicion in my mind. I'm going to play a blind card."

"What's that?"

"I want you to go to that house and ask for Mrs. Stiverson, and when you see her simply say that Robiston sent you. You need not know anything but just that, you see."

"I catch on, sir."

"Well, go, and while you are gone, I'll drop around to Headquarters and see what is really thought about the robbery there."

Silent Seth was all business, and without another word set out upon his new mission, and in a few minutes after that Broadway Billy left the office and went to pay a visit to his patron.

At Headquarters he was greeted cordially as ever.

"Well, what's the case this time?" was asked.

"I guess you know, sir," was Billy's response.

"You are on the Stiverson matter, I am aware."

"That is it. What do you think of that case, sir?"

"It is a peculiar one, Billy."

"You are right it is. My belief is that Willey is as innocent as you are of the theft."

"My own impression exactly. It is puzzling us to find the guilty person, nevertheless. Have you got anybody in sight?"

"Yes, I have, and my object in coming here was to ask you to call off your men and let me have the field to myself. I have an object in making this request."

"That goes without saying. What is your object?"

"I have a double case on hand, and the two cases seem inclined to run together in one."

"And this bank case is the one?"

"Yes."

"Well, if I let go, Billy, are you sure enough of your ground to hold the case?"

"Were I not I would not ask what I do. I can lay my hands on the men who are at the bottom of it all, and a little more work will give me the proofs."

"All right, I'll do it. You may go it alone."

"Thank you, sir. Will you please get word to your man as soon as you can?"

"Why the hurry?"

"I have reason to believe he may have a suspicion against a certain chap who will lead him right into my camp, and maybe spoil my other case."

"All right, I'll see to it, Billy, but I wouldn't do it for any private detective in New York. But, you are not exactly a private, since I consider you on my staff."

"I am at your command all the time, sir."

"And I'm glad you are. But, what is the other case you speak about?"

"Have you heard about the missing Mr. Shyrock?"

"Yes, by the papers."

"I am looking for him. I begin to see light ahead."

"Something of a peculiar case, as near as I could judge from the meager reports of it."

"A decidedly peculiar case, sir. My clue leads me to Mr. Gaffner Stiverson, from whom I hope to get information that will enable me to clear it up."

"Explain."

"The two men were close friends, at any rate in their business relations, and evidently had no secrets from each other. I have found that for some years past Mr. Stiverson has been absenting himself from home about the same as Mr. Shyrock has been doing."

"And you suspect—"

"That they are working together in some secret business, something perhaps not altogether straight."

"Oh! Well, go ahead, Billy, and sift the matter to the bottom, and let me know how it comes out. Then I'll show you this little memorandum which I will seal here and now in your presence."

"What is it, sir?"

"Were I ready to tell you, what need to seal it?"

"Pardon me, I did not stop to weigh my words; tongue got ahead of reason that time."

The famous thief-catcher had penciled a note while Billy had been speaking, and while making his response he sealed it in an envelope, putting a distinguishing mark upon it.

That envelope he now laid away in a drawer of his desk.

Broadway Billy was using his wits at high pressure at the same time, trying to guess what the chief's note could be.

He carefully recalled the remark by him that had led to the making of the memorandum, and weighed it well though quickly, and like a flash an idea came to him. He believed he had struck it.

"Yes, go ahead," the noted detective chief was saying, in response to Billy's remark. "You are on the right track, and I'm sure you will make a success of the case. When it is done we will talk it over and see how close I have come to certain things in it."

"By your leave, sir," said Billy, "I'll make a note the same as you have done, leaving it here with you, and we'll open them together after the matter has been cleared up and settled. Like you, I will make no mention of what mine is, but I'm willing to let it stand on its merits, hit or miss. If I miss the mark, so be it."

The chief smiled, and after some further talk Billy took leave.

CHAPTER XII.

HARRY IN HONEY.

IN the mean time Happy Harry had hustled along on the track of Jack, the youth from the bank, and had shadowed him successfully to his destination.

And that destination was a third-rate hotel, one which did not enjoy a very savory reputation.

Harry stepped out of sight for a moment and effected a change of disguise. That done, he entered boldly.

It has been explained more than once that both Harry and Seth carried with them a number of articles calculated to change their appearance at shortest notice, and practice had made them adepts in the art.

The one Harry had on now was a very graceful little mustache to match his hair, and a pair of student spectacles.

As soon as he entered he caught sight of his suspect.

The youth was looking idly around the room, as if in search of some one, and Harry made as if not to notice him at all.

Evidently not finding the person for whom he was in search, the fellow sat down to wait, and Harry took a seat a little distance from him and opened a newspaper.

Harry had not long to wait for developments.

The door presently opened and Beaumont Robiston and Horace Shyrock entered.

Looking around the room with keenest scrutiny for a few moments, they advanced to where the young bank clerk sat.

Happy Harry did not move and so did not draw attention to himself, and he was able to observe them from behind his student spectacles without fear of detection.

It would have been amazing to the two rascals could they have known who the party with the newspaper really was, for they had no reason to suppose either Harry or Seth could be there.

They would probably know more of Broadway Billy and his beagles before they got done with them.

"Well, boy, you are here?" Robiston greeted Jack.

"Yes, sir," the response.

"And I suppose your time is short," put in young Shyrock.

"Yes; I'm only out for forty minutes, and fifteen of that's gone a'ready."

"We won't keep you long," said Robiston. "I suppose you know you are on mighty dangerous ground, don't you?"

The youth paled.

Happy Harry could hear all.

"Yes, I s'pose I am," was the response.

"You are right you are. If you get detected you will go up for twenty years—not a day less. It will pay you to watch out sharp."

"Y—yes, sir. That's what I'm trying to do, sir."

"And you want to be careful how you talk," warned Shyrock, and as he spoke he glanced at Happy Harry and lowered his voice. "One little word might get you in over your head, you know."

"I know it, and I'm sorry I'm in it."

"Too late, now; but why are you sorry?"

"Because I'm afraid of Broadway Billy."

"Afraid of Broadway Billy? Why are you afraid of him? He can't prove anything against you. All you have to do is to keep a stiff upper lip and you will come out all right. If you once get frightened you are a goner, sure."

"I'll tell you why I am afraid of him. When he looked at me I thought I could feel his eyes burning holes right through me. I half believe he could read what I was thinking about, and that's no lie. I wish I wasn't in it, and I wouldn't go in it again for double the money, either."

"Ha, ha, ha! Why it was all in your imagination, Jack. It is because you know you are guilty that you felt that. You must take care not to show it, or he will yank you up in a jiffy. Just make up your mind that you are going to beat him bad, and he'll never be able to get anything out of you. If you don't, your money won't do you any good, that's sure."

"I'll try it, of course, for I don't want to get caught. But, where is the money? I haven't seen it yet."

Happy Harry was so excited that he found it hard to contain himself.

He wanted to spring right out to the middle of the floor and there give a whoop and execute a war-dance.

"Oh! the money! We didn't forget that, Jack, and here it is. Mind, you must take care not to spend it till this thing has all blown over, or that may bring suspicion down upon you in a hurry."

"I'll take care of that."

A roll of money was given to the youth, which was quickly stowed away out of sight in the inside pocket of his vest.

"Now, tell us what you know," ordered Shyrock.

"Well, Broadway Billy has tumbled to it that it's a fake, for one thing."

"What is a fake?"

"The Canada racket."

"Ha! you have heard something, then?"

"He has been at the bank again and had a talk with Jones."

"And what did he say?"

"He thinks Willey is innocent."

"The deuce!"

Shyrock and Robiston exchanged glances fraught with meaning.

"Tell us what Broadway Billy said," directed Robiston.

"Well, I couldn't tell everything, for I don't remember it all. He asked a good many questions, and Jones told him about the money that fell out of Willey's pocket, and the Canada ticket."

"What did he say to that?"

"He whistled."

"Ha! it bit him heavy, did it?"

"That was what I thought, too, at first, but I changed my mind."

"Why?"

"Why, he turned right to me and said—I guess that package of money wasn't in his pocket very securely, Jack. And I tell you I felt creepy all over. I believe he has got a notion I put it there."

Again did the two partners in villainy exchange meaning looks.

"And what did you say?" asked Shyrock.

"I said I guessed not."

"Then what did he say?"

"Why, he told me I needn't get frightened just because he looked at me."

"Proof that he noticed you were scared. Jack, you will have to brace up better than that, or you will get into a hole."

"I'll try my best."

"And just let me put a bug in your ear," said Robiston, menacingly. "If you do get into trouble, and you tell on anybody else, your life won't be worth a nickel. Do you savvy?"

"Y—yes, sir."

"Well, keep it fresh in your mind, that's all."

"You see how it is," added Shyrock. "Your word wouldn't go far against that of other folks, while their word would send you up Salt River to stay. Do you see? So, be mighty careful how you carry yourself."

"Y—yes, sir, I see."

"That's all, then. But, what more did Broadway Billy say?"

"Well, he said he thought it was a fake, a few hundred dollars and a ticket in Willey's pocket, when twelve thousand dollars had been stolen. Said it looked like a put-up job."

Exchange of glances again.

"I thought I'd tell you that, you see," the youth added. "Thought you'd ought to know how the wind was blowing there. And now I must git, for I'll only have just time enough to get back on time."

"All right, get out with you. Be careful, and keep your eyes and ears open, too."

"I will."

"And, if you learn anything you think we ought to know, don't fail to get it to us as soon as you can."

"I'll take care to do that, you bet."

A word or two more and the lad went off.

The studious student behind the newspaper had not moved or stirred, but seemed to be oblivious to everything.

"Well, what do you think now?"

As he put the question Robiston glanced at Harry, and drew nearer to Shyrock, dropping his voice yet lower than before.

"I think there is cause for alarm, now, for I am afraid of that young fellow," was the dismal response, just loud enough for Harry to overhear and no more. "There is not enough marrow in his bones."

"Well, what can we do for safety?"

"Not a thing."

"We'll have to trust to circumstances, eh?"

"Don't see what else we can do. A few hours will tell the tale, you see. If Jack can hold his ground, and Willey is convicted, then we are safe."

"And if it don't work that way, if the worst comes, what then?"

"We'll have to light out, or one of us. No need for both of us to be dragged into it, is there?"

"It means both, if either."

They were thoughtful for some moments.

"When do we divide?" Horace presently asked.

"Any time you please, unless we find suspicion has dropped our way, when we shall have to be very careful about our actions."

"That is so; but I want my share of the profits the same as I have had my share of the work and the danger. I wasn't in it so much for gain, but may as well have my share."

"Have you seen Florence since?"

"No, but I'm going to see her just as soon as Willey gets in so he will stay. May go before; can't say sure."

"You ought to strike while the iron is hot, and make it as bad against Willey as you can, and you may win. Whatever you say against him I'll back up for you, you know."

"That's the bargain, I believe. Well, we had better separate, I think. You had better come to the store to-morrow and ante up. I can make good use of about that sum just now. By the way, where is it? Where you said? Well, she will take good care of it, I've no doubt."

CHAPTER XIII.

SILENT SETH STIRRED UP.

HAPPY HARRY was filled with delight.

If he had envied Seth the good stroke of work he had done at the store, now he felt that he had done a better.

And, best of all, he hadn't been detected! It was self-evident that no thought of suspicion had entered the minds of these men against him, and he hoped to get off without it.

He was so full of exultation that he could hardly contain himself, too.

Unless he got a chance to give vent to his feelings soon, he felt that he would explode then and there.

The suspense did not last much longer, for the two men now shook hands and parted, going out one after the other and each going in an opposite direction on leaving the place.

It was not Harry's intention to follow either of them.

To do so, he felt, would be to gain nothing, and he had something more important on hand.

The information he had gleaned was such that his chief ought to be in possession of it as early as possible, and Harry meant to get to the office with as little delay as he could.

When the two men had been gone about a couple of minutes, Harry sprung up, tearing his newspaper in two with a sharp jerk, and after executing a turn in the middle of the floor, to the amazement of all observers, darted from the house and away up the street.

"Christopher Columbia!" he cried, as soon as out on the street, "but that was a rare streak of clear luck, that was! I feel as though I'd like to yell like a wild Injun about it. I must do somethin', too, or I'll never be able to stand it till I get to the office. Must work off some of this high pressure somehow, sure. Ha!"

He had just reached the first corner, and there was an Italian busily grinding away at a peanut roaster.

Harry was smiling broadly, almost laughing, and had never felt quite so happy in his life be-

fore, he believed. And he must have excitement of some sort at once or die of high pressure.

"Here, Dago, catch on!" he cried, and laying hold upon the Italian, who was no larger than himself, he pulled him away from his roaster and forced him into a waltz around on the corner of the pavement, to the amusement of the crowd that collected in a moment.

"Hi! What-a for you do-a dis?" the Dago cried. "You-a let-a me go! Hi! I tell-a you let-a me go! Dam! you are a crazy fellow, that-a sure-a ting. What-a for you mean? Let-a me go!"

"All right, there you go!" Harry cried, letting go his hold and leaping lightly away. "Can't you take a little fun? Christopher Columbia was a Dago, you know, and I feel so glad he discovered 'Merica that I feel like hugging the whole lot of you. I tell you what, we are the people!"

With that, and a hearty laugh, Harry ran away and headed for the office, making a record against time.

When he arrived, though, neither Billy nor Seth was there, so he had to content himself as best he could while he waited.

Meanwhile Silent Seth had been prompt in carrying out his latest commission.

Going straight to the Stiverson mansion, from the office, he rung the bell, asked to see Mrs. Stiverson, and was shown into the parlor.

In a little while the lady appeared.

"You want to see me?" she said.

"Yes, if you are Mrs. Stiverson," Seth answered.

"Well, I am she."

"Mr. Robiston sent me, ma'm."

"What did he send you for?"

"I do not know, ma'm."

"That is very strange, I must say. How am I to know what he wants?"

"I don't know. I asked what I should say to you, and he said—nothing at all; you would know."

"But, I don't know."

"Then I'll have to go back and say so."

"Does he expect you to bring anything to him?"

"I rather think he does, but I'm all in the dark."

"Well, it is a strange matter, that is certain. Why did he not tell you something definite?"

"You will have to ask him?"

"Where did you see him?"

"He was at Mr. Horace Shyrock's store."

"Ahl! then I think I understand it better. He evidently did not care to trust you with secrets."

"That's about the size of it, I guess, to speak plainly."

"And you think he expects you to bring him something?"

"It must be that, since he didn't send me to get any information."

"Yes, I guess so, too, particularly as he sent you from Horace Shyrock's store direct. But, I do not understand it, even so."

"And of course I don't, ma'm."

Silent Seth was playing the part of innocence in the matter. He was merely pressing the button, as the pat saying has it, leaving it for the woman to do the rest. He was eager within, but outwardly as undisturbed as ever.

What would be the outcome?

"That is quite plain," the woman rejoined. "Well, wait a few moments and I will prepare a package for you."

"All right, ma'm."

Seth, had he been of Happy Harry's disposition, would have found it hard to contain himself, but he was differently constituted.

The woman left the room, and Seth waited quietly and patiently.

She presently returned.

"Here," she said, extending a package to him, "is probably what Mr. Robiston wants. Take care not to lose it, for it contains some papers of value to him, though they would be of no use to any one else."

"I'll not lose it, ma'm; don't be uneasy."

There was grim truth in that statement, even if Seth had been using some pretty strong fiction before.

He certainly had no intention of losing the package, for once he got clear of the house with it, it would find its way direct to the office of the young detective chief.

"And tell Mr. Robiston if that is not right, to send me word what he does desire, or to come himself."

"Yes, ma'm."

Seth had risen and was moving to the door. He was more than eager to get away, for he

feared something might turn up at any moment to balk him.

"I am taking a risk in trusting you," the woman remarked, half to herself, "but I cannot see but that it must be all right—"

"Obl! it's all right, if this is what he wants," Seth assured. "And I'll make all the haste I can, for he appeared to be in a hurry to get it—"

He was moving out as he spoke, was now at the hall door, and nothing short of force would detain him now.

"Well, take care," warned the woman, "and say to Mr. Robiston that I shall be anxious to hear from him as soon as he can make it convenient—"

"Yes, ma'm, yes, ma'm," Seth hurriedly assented; and having opened the door, he was out and away before she could say more.

He walked with moderate haste till he had turned the first corner, when he broke into a run and made for the office with all the speed he thought safe to assume in the street.

When he reached the office he broke in like a moderate whirlwind.

"Christopher Columbia!" cried Harry, springing to his feet, "the world is coming to an end, sure as Goshen!"

"Why?" asked Seth.

"'Cause you have waked up out of that ice sleep of yours."

"Lucky it is not you, Harry, for the office couldn't hold you if it were. I wish you would stand on your head for me once, just to relieve my feelings."

"Crackers an' cheese! What has happened, anyhow, Seth? The office had a hard enough job to hold me as it was, and now it will bulge out and kerflummox for sure. Tell me, quick."

"I have to, Harry, for I never felt so much like talking in my life."

"Thought nothin' could move you."

"So did I, but I'm moved this time. Where is the boss?"

"I don't know, but I'm jest dyin' to see him. Hope he'll soon come."

"So do I. I don't know whether I can wait till he comes or not, for I'm in a fever to know what's in this package."

"Where did yo get it?"

"Mrs. Stiverson gave it to me to take to Robiston."

"Whoop-ee!" yelled Harry, and in an instant he was standing heels up and executing a dance upon his hands.

"What's the matter?" demanded Seth.

"Oh! Christopher Columbia! Crackers an' cheese! I'm going right out of my head with excess of joy, I know I am."

"I half believe you are. What has struck you now, so hard?"

With a light leap Harry was right side up again.

"I'll tell you," he cried. "I bet I know what's in that package."

"What is it?"

"The boodle that was stole from the bank!"

"Do you know, Harry, that same idea has been buzzing in my head. Wonder if it is that?"

"Sure it is! I'll bet you ten cent's to a spanking it is! I have got onto their haze in grand style, now, and now I'm only dyin' to see the boss to report."

"Wonder if he'd care if we opened it?"

"Better to open it than to die of curiosity, don't you think so?"

"Yes, I do, for I think Broadway Billy would forgive us sooner for curiosity than for suicide."

"Open it, then, for goodness' sake, just as soon as you can, and let's have the agony over with. We thought there wouldn't be any 'citemet in this case, but if I had any more I'd go off, sure."

Seth said nothing, but sawed wood—figuratively speaking. He broke the string, unfolded the papers with eager haste, and soon the contents of the packet were laid bare. There were several packages of bank-notes!

They had made the best haul of their lives!

CHAPTER XIV.

SCOOPING MASTER JACK.

ONE glance at the rich contents of the packet, and Happy Harry went tearing around the room like a crazy fellow.

"Hold me, Seth! hold me! hold me!" he called out. "If you don't I'll be a howling idiot before the boss comes, sure as you live! I'm likely to grab that boodle and strike a bee-line for Candy—I mean Canada."

And at the same time Silent Seth, showing more of excitement than he had ever manifested before over any event, was standing with his thumbs and fingers pressed together in front of

him in a very Quakerish manner, and was whistling softly the most solemn dirge he knew.

In the midst of it all, into the office came Broadway Billy.

With one of his keen glances around he took in the situation immediately, and saw the prize his beagles had brought him.

"Sweet pertaters!" he ejaculated, with all his old-time vim, "but you have done yourself proud this time, Silent Seth! This is more than I dared hope for when I sent you on that errand."

"Me too!" exclaimed Happy Harry, stopping his antics and striking an attitude before his chief. "Me, too, boss!"

"You want a share of the praise, do you?"

"You bet I do."

"Well, what am I to praise you for? Here is Seth's work, in plain sight. I take it that you have some valuable information for me. Have I hit it?"

"You can just bet both boots and one sock that you have."

"Well, what is it?"

"It's all right that Seth has got the boodle, and I'm mighty proud of him for it, and mighty glad; but, that ain't the whole of it yet. I have got the robbers dead to rights."

"You have?"

"You bet!"

"Who are they?"

"Make a guess on't."

"Well, it won't be hard to guess, with the clew I now hold. You see, I know where Seth got the plunder."

"That's so. Well, it's them; Jack, Robiston, and Horace Shyrock. They are the pretty rogues that did the business for old Stive."

"How did you get onto them?"

"Jack went to meet them, and I heard all they said."

"And they didn't suspect you?"

"Nary."

"Should have thought they would, after your being tangled up with them so often today."

"No, I got the bulge on 'em in fine style this time, and took in all they had to say. They paid Jacksey for his share in the business."

"I felt sure that lad was in it."

"And he is, clear up to his chin. And they are all shaky in their boots because you are after 'em."

"They'll shake more, before we get done with them, I am thinking. But, have you some proof against Master Jack, so that I can nab him at once?"

"You bet!"

"What is it?"

"Why, he's got the money they gave him right here in his vest pocket, inside, and there you will find it, if you take him before he leaves the bank. He only had enough time to get there when he left the rascals."

"Then he is my tender tid-bit, you bet! I'll have him inside of half an hour, and I'll scare a confession out of him before he will know what he is about."

"Bully!" cried Harry. "Can't you take us along with you to see the fun?"

"No; I have other work for you and Seth."

"What's that?"

"Why, the way it stands now, as soon as Robiston and Mrs. Stiverson meet, the cat will be out of the bag, and they may attempt to light out. They must be watched, you see."

"And you want Seth and me to do that?"

"Yes."

"We are ready for it," spoke up Seth. "We have done one good stroke apiece, and maybe we can cap it with another."

"Yes, you have each done good work," Billy complimented, "and you may be able to get in another lick at the rascals before you are done with them. I'll give you the chance, anyhow."

"We'll haze 'em, you bet!" ejaculated Harry. "We have got our war-paint on, now, with our hair done up in battle array, and if we don't take the dust out of their gay feathers, you can take us out and take the dust out of us, that's all. Seth is on his muscle now, for sure."

"No more than Harry," Seth averred.

"You are both on your muscle, I guess," said Billy, with a laugh. "And you have good reason to feel as proud as peacocks."

"Well, sir, give us our work to do," requested Seth, modestly.

"All right, Shadower; you go back to the Stiverson mansion and keep guard over the house, and if Robiston comes there, don't lose track of him again after that or we may not find him when we want him."

"All right, sir."

"And you, Harry, do the same for Horace

Shyrock. And, both of you must use your best disguises now, for if you get into their hands, after they learn what is up, they may do away with you."

"We'll take the chances of that."

"All right; that all comes in a detective's career. Now, I'll leave you to prepare yourselves, and I'll attend to Master Jack."

"How I'd like to see the surl!" cried Harry.

"Never mind; I'll tell you about it after it is over."

So, Billy hastened away, leaving Harry and Seth to prepare for their further duties.

While talking, Billy had wrapped up the banknotes again, and carried them with him when he set out for the bank.

His first thought had been to go to the bank direct, but he changed his mind and went to Headquarters instead, to show his prize to his patron there.

The moment he entered he was cheerfully greeted.

"Well, I see success written upon your face, Billy," the superintendent observed.

"And you'll see it hero in this package, too, sir," Billy declared, as he laid the package on the table.

"You have recovered the boodle, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

Billy opened the package and displayed its contents.

"Good stroke of work!" he was complimented. "How and where did you get it?"

"My boy Seth did it, sir," Billy proudly admitted.

"But, he acted under your directions, of course?"

"Well, yes; I have to admit that."

Billy thereupon told about the bluff movement he had made, and the success it had brought him.

"Excellent!" was the word of praise. "Excellent! I must tell Williams what your Silent Shadower has done. Those boys are bound to win his confidence the same as you won mine, Billy."

"I hope they may, sir."

There was a lively and friendly chat for some minutes, and when Billy took leave he was accompanied by a man from Headquarters to act as his witness to whatever confession the boy at the bank might make.

When they reached the bank and entered, Billy addressed Jones, while his companion remained in the background.

"Well, sir, we have got at the bottom of the theft," Billy remarked.

He had one eye on the boy Jack, and saw him give a great start, his face turning pale, and he bent low over his books.

"What so soon?" the acting head clerk exclaimed.

"Yes, sir."

"And it isn't Willey?"

"Oh, no! it isn't Willey at all."

At that moment who should come in but Willey himself!

He looked pale and worn, caused by his anxiety, but was otherwise calm.

"Hal! I am glad to see you!" greeted Billy.

"Thank you, sir," was the response, taking the offered hand. "Can you still believe me innocent?"

"Not only so, sir, but I can prove you innocent," was Billy's response.

"What! You can prove it?"

"Yes."

"Thank God. Who was the thief?"

"There is one of them, right there, sir!" and Billy pointed at Jack.

That young rascal, who had been watching out of the corner of his eye, now leaped off his stool with a cry and a face like death.

"It ain't so!" he cried. "It ain't so! I defy you to prove anything of the sort. You are trying to scare me and get it fastened upon me, but you can't do that. I am up to you. It ain't so at all!"

"Just let me see what that is you have got in your inside vest pocket, if you please," Billy requested.

At that the lad had the appearance of being about to faint.

He staggered, and had to grasp the edge of the desk for support, while a perspiration appeared upon his forehead.

"I—I—I ain't got nothin' there," he denied.

"Very well, then, what are you so frightened about?"

"I—I—I ain't frightened; I'm sick, that's all, sir."

"Taken suddenly, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is he subject to such spells, Mr. Willey?"

"Never knew him to have one before," was the answer from that source.

"Then I'll have to think he's lying," Billy declared. "Come out here, young fellow, till I search you."

Down upon his knees dropped Master Jack, up went his hands, and he begged like a good fellow, declaring his innocence by everything he could think of, but that had no effect upon the detective.

Billy went in behind the inclosure, snapped a pair of handcuffs upon the lad's wrists, and then searched his pocket, bringing forth the bills from the pocket where Happy Harry had reported them to be. The proof against him was all that could be desired, and he was fast in the hands of the law.

CHAPTER XV.

COMING TO A CLOSING.

"LET me go! Oh! please let me go!" wailed the dishonest youth, dropping upon his knees and uplifting his manacled hands pleadingly. "I will tell you all about it if you will only let me go. I didn't do it alone; I was put up to it, and I'll tell you all about it if you will only let me go."

"We don't want you to tell us anything," said Billy, severely. "We know all about it already. We know where you were less than an hour ago, and who paid this money to you for your rascally services. We have got a sure case against you all, and you are going up for it."

"No, no, no! Don't send me to prison, Mr. Weston! Oh, please don't send me to prison!" wailed the miserable Jack. "It was Mr. Robiston and Mr. Shyrock that did the stealing; I only let them into the bank. That was all I did!"

"Yes, very nice that was," sneered Billy. "Perhaps you will say you did not open the safe for them."

"No, no I didn't! I swear I didn't do that! Robiston did it himself!"

"Just what I thought. Now I see through the whole game. You men are paying attention to all that is said?" turning to the witnesses present.

The detective and Willey and the clerk Jones all answered in the affirmative to the question.

The two last were very surprised men.

"How could Robiston learn the combination?" Willey questioned.

"Easily enough, if a certain woman could get it from her husband," Billy gave the hint.

"Hal! that is so. Why did I not think of that?"

"Maybe you were blind to it all."

"No, I have not been blind to it, but it has gone further than I ever had a thought it would go."

"That is very likely. But, you have not said how it is you are out of the jng, Mr. Willey. What good influence has been at work?"

"Bail was furnished by Miss Shyrock, sir."

"Hal! then Miss Stiverson was too late?"

"Yes, for while she was with me, declaring her belief in my innocence, the other was at work in my behalf, and when Florence went to act it was all done."

"Then you owe much to Miss Shyrock."

"Yes, as I am sorry to say, for I had rather it had been Miss Stiverson. But, this is a private matter. You say you have got at the bottom of this thing, I hope you will be able to recover the money."

"Here it is, right here," and Billy tossed the package to him.

"Thanks to Heaven!" the chief clerk said devoutly.

"Just see if it is all there, with this I have taken from Jack's pocket and the sum he put into your overcoat, together, perhaps, with the price of the Canada ticket."

"It was Jack who put that in my pocket?"

"No other."

"Curse you!" and Willey turned upon the youth bitterly. "After all the kindness I have ever shown you."

At that the young criminal broke down and cried bitterly.

The chief clerk counted the money quickly, by packages, and reported that it was all there, as nearly as he could tell.

And, needless to say, he was a happy man, to think that his honor had been cleared and the loss restored in so short a time. It was almost too good to be true, and tears were in his eyes.

"I shall never forget you, Billy Weston!" he said, giving his hand to Billy. "You have saved my honor."

"Don't mention it," Billy waived. "Let us hear what this promising young rascal has to

say for himself. Tell us all about it, Master Jack, and let's see just what your part in it was."

"If I only hadn't done it, if I only hadn't done it," the youth wailed.

"Yes, if you only hadn't," said Billy; "but the trouble is, you see, you did, and you will have to take the consequences."

"But I was put up to it; they held out the bait to me, and I took it."

"You didn't have to take it, and you wouldn't if you had been honest. No honest boy or man gets into trouble of this kind, or if he does he is bound to get out again the same as Mr. Willey here has done. But tell your story."

"Well, it was Robiston that was at the head of it all. He came to me and said he would give me five hundred dollars if I would come here and open the bank door and let him and Shyrock in, and then he would give me a hundred more if I would put the money in Mr. Willey's pocket, and I said I would."

"And that's all you did in the matter?"

"Yes, that's all; I swear that's all."

"And that's quite enough. You will go with this gentleman to the lock-up, and we'll see to you later on."

The other detective stepped forward at that, and took charge of the prisoner, and in spite of all his pleading and begging he was taken out and away to the nearest station.

It now remained only to secure Robiston and Shyrock.

Before doing that, however, Billy had something else in mind to carry out, and that of considerable importance.

The chief clerk having returned the money to the safe and reassumed his position in the bank, Billy turned to him for a little talk. He wanted some information from him.

"How long has Mr. Stiverson been sick?" he asked.

"It is about two weeks now, sir," the answer.

"Can you give me the time to a day?"

Willey could, and did so.

Note was made of it.

"I understand," said Billy, then, "that Mr. Stiverson had been in the habit of absenting himself from home for two and three days at a time quite often."

"Yes, that's true."

"Where did he go?"

"To Philadelphia."

"Has he a place of business there?"

"He has a part interest in a concern in that city, I believe."

"Same business as this?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you give me some exact dates, recent, when he has been absent from here?"

"Yes, I think I can, sir."

A small book was consulted, and some dates were given.

"You can rely upon them," Willey said. "But, what has all this got to do with the case, now that it is ended?"

"Nothing, with this case, but it may have something to do with another. By the way, was Mr. Shyrock, Hickman Shyrock, I mean, in the habit of coming here often?"

"No, not often; he came occasionally. He has an account here, but his head man usually came to deposit."

"Did Mr. Shyrock have any talk with Mr. Stiverson when he came here?"

"No. The fact is, come to think of it, Mr. Stiverson was never in when he called."

"That's enough. You may hear of something that will surprise you before this game ends. Well, for the present I'll take myself off. Your case has been straightened out, anyhow."

"Yes, and sooner than I dared hope for, thanks to you."

"And my team," added Billy, earnestly.

He seldom forgot to give credit to Harry and Seth, and never when credit was particularly due them.

Twenty minutes later found Billy at the door of the Stiverson mansion.

"I want to see Mrs. Stiverson," he announced.

"She cannot be seen, sir," he was told.

He had looked around to see something of Silent Seth, on approaching the house but the Silent Shadower was not there.

This had led him to suspect that Robiston had been there, and that the news was out, now, that their scheme was known, and the servant's answer did not surprise him.

"I cannot take that for an answer," he said, bluntly. "I must see the lady, and you will please take me to her at once."

At that the girl paled, and knew not what to say.

"I—I can't do it, sir," she faltered. "I'll,

lose my place if I let you in, when my order is to admit no one."

"Can't help anything about that, young woman, I'm in in spite of you, you see. Now, conduct me to the room where your mistress is, or I'll see if these things will fit on your wrists."

He had pushed his way in while speaking, and he now dangled a pair of handcuffs before the eyes of the frightened maid.

"Mercy!" the girl cried. "What does it mean?"

"You will find out, if you do not obey orders pretty sharp," Billy assured.

"Well, come this way, sir, and come quick, or I shall faint with fright. I am almost scared to death."

A thought came to Billy.

The girl did not look as badly terrified as she declared she was, and he suspected a trick.

"Just wait a moment first," he said, and turning, he locked the door and put the key in his pocket. "There," he added, "now I'm ready."

The girl paled, now, and led the way without another word.

"This way," she said, turning into a room at the end of the hall. "Right in this way, sir."

She seemed anxious about it, and in haste, and Billy went slow.

He glanced down the stairs that led to the basement, and as he did so he saw a woman walking toward the front of the house.

Without a word he sprung back to the door, and looked out.

He was just in time. Mrs. Stiverson came hurriedly up from the basement entrance and made for the street gate.

"Hold on, if you please," said Billy, in a stern voice. "I want a word with you, madam."

With a cry the woman stopped short, but only for an instant, when she turned and ran with all the speed she could command, down the street.

Billy was after her like a flash, and soon laid a detaining hand upon her shoulder and brought her to a stop. She faced him with the fury of a tigress at bay, but a pair of adjustable handcuffs quickly encircled her delicate wrists.

"If you want to avoid a scene, madam," Billy then observed quietly, "come back to the house with me peacefully and at once."

She went, muttering imprecations as she did so.

CHAPTER XVI.

SURPRISING DISCLOSURE.

WHEN they entered Billy looked around for the servant who had admitted him at first, but she was not to be found.

He never saw her again. It was quite probable that her own record was not altogether clear, and that she had thought it just as well to take time by the forelock.

"Now, madam," said Billy, when they were within, "I would like for you to let me have the full history of this case from beginning to end, so far as you are concerned in it. You will lose nothing by making a full confession."

"I confess nothing," was the defiant retort. "If you know anything against me, prove it. If you cannot do that, then you shall be put through for this outrageous conduct on your part. You will find that it does not pay to arrest a respectable woman as you have arrested me."

"Don't toss your head so high," Billy cautioned. "I would never have taken the step I have without being sure of my ground. I know you were concerned with Beaumont Robiston in the robbery of your husband's bank. My messenger was here only a little time ago and received the stolen money from your hands. There, now, it will do you no good to deny it."

"I was not going to deny it, Mr. Weston."

"Then you do not deny it?"

"I do not, sir."

"Then you can see that you are into the thing further than is good for you, can you not?"

"Let me ask you how you are going to prove anything against me? You will offer the statement, but it will be quite another thing for you to prove it, and if you fail in that, look out."

"Suppose we change the subject for the moment. How is your husband this morning, madam?"

"He is about the same, I guess. What matters that to you?"

"Will you kindly tell me what his ailment is?"

Billy eyed the woman keenly as he put the question, and she turned pale under his steady gaze.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Just what I ask. What is the matter with

your husband? Nothing in that to cause you alarm, is there?"

"Assuredly not, sir. For a diagnosis of his case I would refer you to his physician, who will no doubt gratify your curiosity fully. You need expect nothing from me."

"He might tell me if he knows," Billy intimated.

The woman paled even more, and her fingers clasped together nervously.

"I know not what you mean," she said, with dignity. "Speak out plainly or do not speak at all."

"Let us go up and see your husband," said Billy.

"You are at liberty to do so, sir; I am not going with you."

"Very well, then you may accompany me to the station first, and I will come back again."

"What! you would not heap that indignity upon me, would you?"

"What indignity?"

"Taking me to the station."

"That is what I generally do with a prisoner."

"Mr. Weston, see here."

"Well?"

"My name to a check is good for five thousand dollars."

"I have no reason to doubt your statement, Mrs. Stiverson."

"Let me go free, at once, and I'll leave a check in your hands for that sum."

"Thank you, ma'am, but I'm not a bird of that feather. You cannot buy yourself out of my hands."

The woman's whole attitude changed at once.

She had evidently thought this argument one that could not fail, but she did not know the man with whom she had to deal.

Lifting her fettered hands, she began to implore Billy to let her go, even going so far as to double the offer she had already made, but that was of no use whatever.

Billy would not take a bribe under any circumstances, but this time, to carry another point, he did not refuse outright.

"While I think about that," he said, "let us go up and see your husband. I desire to make his acquaintance."

"Promise that you will not tell what you know, that I was about to elope with Robiston, and I will do as you say."

"Very well, I promise that."

"Then come on."

Billy had not suspected quite so far as that, but nothing in his manner betrayed his ignorance on the point.

He followed the woman, and was led up into the hall above, where she stopped to say, in whisper:

"Won't you remove these before we go in?" holding out her hands.

"Not necessary, madam," Billy answered. "I will open the door, and you can hold your hands clasped naturally."

A frown darkened the woman's brow.

"Well, there is the room," she snapped, indicating by a nod of her head.

Billy stepped forward and opened the door, drawing back then and allowing the woman to enter the apartment ahead of him.

On the bed lay a man—a man past middle age, and one whom Billy recognized at a glance, although he had never seen him before in his life. He was very pale and thin, and evidently very weak.

"Gaffner, a young man to see you," Mrs. Stiverson said.

The sick man's eyes were already upon Billy in a questioning way, and Billy stepped forward, saying:

"Mr. Shyrock, I am glad to find you, but sorry to find you so ill. I hope it may not come to the worst with you. Your family—"

"My God!" the sick man gasped an interruption, having raised himself upon his elbow. "Do you know the truth? Then spare me, spare me, spare me! Let me hide my crime and my shame in death."

The woman was staring at her husband in speechless amazement.

"That would be a good idea, were death the end," remarked Billy; "but it is not the end. Just as surely as we live now we shall live again, sir."

The sick man only groaned.

"What does this mean?" asked the woman, looking from one to the other.

"I will leave it for your husband to tell you if he desires to do so," Billy made reply, hoping thus to draw out a confession.

"It means that I am being punished—punished for my crime," the sick man sadly con-

fessed. "It means that I must right the wrong before it is forever too late. My dear wife, how I have cheated and wronged her!"

"Don't waste your sympathy in her direction, sir," said Billy. "She has been cheating and wronging you none the less—"

"Sir, your promise," the woman sharply interrupted.

"I remember what it was," Billy made response. "I don't intend to break it, madam."

"What does this mean?" the sick man questioned. "I meant my true wife."

"I will leave it for this woman to tell you, if she desires to do so," Billy said, making reply the same as he had made to the woman a moment before.

With that he stepped back, and the man and woman faced each other.

"What does it mean?" the man asked.

"What does it mean in your case?" the counter-question.

At that moment hasty steps were heard in the hall, and the door was flung open and a young woman rushed in.

It was Florence Stiverson, and her face was flushed with excitement and the haste she had evidently been making, and her breathing was quick.

"Oh! papa," she cried, "if you only knew!"

She gave a scornful glance at Mrs. Stiverson as she said it.

"Only knew what, my child?" the sick man asked.

"The wrongs you have suffered. This woman has been false to you!"

She pointed with scorn at the guilty wife, who cowered before her, and her form trembled.

"It is not for me to fling the first stone at her," said the sick man, sorrowfully. "My own evil deeds are coming home to me now."

The girl looked at him in amazement.

"What can you mean?" she asked.

"I mean that of all miserable beings. I am the most miserable; that, of all guilty scoundrels, I am the worst."

"Oh, papa, do not say so; no one ever had so good a father as you have been to me."

The sick man gave a sob, chokingly.

"Call me not father!" he said. "Curse me, rather. Hate me. Say something bitter against me. Say the worst you can think. I deserve it all."

The girl looked to Billy for an explanation.

"Surely, my poor father must be going out of his mind," she said.

"Not so," Billy assured, "but he is in the frame of mind to do what he can to undo the wrong he has done. Mr. Shyrock, whom shall I send for?"

"Shyrock!" the girl cried.

"Your father and Hickman Shyrock are one and the same," Billy explained.

With a cry the girl reeled back, and would have fallen had she not found support against the wall.

"What does it mean?" demanded the wife in name, once again.

"It means that I have been leading a double life," the sick man confessed. "It means that I have two wives, under different names, and you are one. It means that I have lived a lie with you these dozen years."

He then turned to Broadway Billy.

"You may send for my lawyer, Mr. Hedgesley," he said, "and for witnesses. I am ready to confess, for I feel that death is near, and that it were better to lift the load from my own soul in this world, if I can, than to carry it with me into the world to come."

"Miss Stiverson, will you call a servant?" Billy requested.

The girl, pale and trembling, nodded, and stepped into the hall for that purpose.

A servant was soon there, and Billy writing several brief notes and directing them, requested Miss Stiverson to send the servant with them in all haste.

This was done, and when the servant had gone Billy proposed that nothing further be said regarding the complicated matter pending the arrival of the lawyer and the witnesses who had been sent for.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DYING MAN'S STORY.

BILLY's proposal was not carried out fully, nor did he insist that it should be, for he was eager enough himself to learn all he could from what passed among the three persons present.

They all talked, while they waited, and although their wait was quite a long one it was rewarded at last.

In the mean time Harry and Seth had been having a jubilee.

Shadowing the Stiverson mansion, Seth had seen Robiston come and enter the house.

His stay was a short one, and when he took his leave his face was decidedly troubled and he went away in more haste than he had come.

The Silent Shadower was upon his trail, cleverly disguised, and he clung to him with determination, never arousing a suspicion, and followed him straight to Horace Shyrock's store.

There he fell in with Happy Harry, who was shadowing young Shyrock, and they made a hasty comparison of notes.

In a brief time the two rascals came forth from the store.

Both were pale and worried, and Shyrock carried a grip and had an overcoat over his arm.

They looked keenly around them, but saw nothing to arouse their suspicions. A colored youth was a little distance away down the street, and a ragged bootblack was sitting on his box across the way.

These, of course, were hardly noticed, much less suspected.

The two men hastened away from the store, and the two young ferrets kept them well in sight.

No stop was made till they came to a house on — street, where Robiston entered in haste while Shyrock waited, but soon reappeared similarly armed with a grip and overcoat.

"They mean to light out, sure," said Harry to Seth, as they observed their actions from a handy place of concealment.

"You are right," Seth agreed, "but we mean to see to it that they don't. We must handle our case with mighty good care, now, or it may get away with us."

When the men resumed their way they set out after them as before, far enough behind to avoid detection, and so continued till they fell in with a policeman, when Seth stopped.

This had been arranged with Harry, and he kept straight on after the game.

"Know me?" Seth asked the officer.

"No, you rascal, I don't," was the answer he got.

"Well, I don't wonder, for I hardly know myself. I'm one of Broadway Billy's team."

"You!"

"Yes. But come along this way while I tell you something, for there is some game ahead that mustn't get away."

"Can you prove what you say, that you are one of Billy Weston's team?"

"Here's my badge; take a look at that."

"Well, I'm hanged! But come along, and I'll hear what you have to say. It may be something important, for all I know."

"It is important. Heard of the Stiverson bank robbery, haven't you?"

"Yes. Don't mean to say you are on that case?"

"Nothing less, and the two men ahead there whom Harry is following are the robbers. We've got them dead to rights, and the signs of the times are that they mean to skip out and leave us in the lurch if they can. We want you to take them in and prance them down to Headquarters, and if we are not right Broadway Billy will stand all the blame."

"You amaze me, young fellow. Come on, and we'll scoop them."

So the policeman hastened forward with Seth, soon overtaking Harry, and they followed their suspects to the Central.

There they allowed them to buy tickets, but when that had been done Seth's policeman and another stepped up to them and arrested them, giving them the usual warning not to resist.

The two men were highly indignant, at first, and denied everything, but when Harry and Seth stepped up and made themselves known their denials turned to curses.

They were hurried off to Headquarters, where they arrived just about the time the inspector received a note from Broadway Billy.

"This is luck," the inspector cried. "Here your chief wants me to send out and find you and bring you to him, with your suspects, and you walk in upon me at the moment you are wanted."

The situation was explained all around, and a party set out for the residence of Gaffner Stiverson.

When they arrived there they were taken at once to the room where the sick man lay, and where they were being awaited. They were the last of the expected ones to arrive.

Mrs. Shyrock and her daughter had arrived just a few minutes ahead of them, and the meet-

ing between the husband and the lawful wife had been a tearful one, though no explanation had as yet been made. The company was now complete.

There were Broadway Billy and his team, the inspector, Mr. Shyrock, of course, and his wife, son, and daughter; Mrs. Stiverson, Miss Stiverson, Beaumont Robiston, and the lawyer; Vance Willey, Spencer Witherton, and Mr. Stiverson's doctor. The latter had been sent for, as the sick man had shown symptoms of being decidedly worse.

"Are we all here, young gentlemen?" the lawyer asked, addressing Billy.

Mr. Stiverson, or Skyrack—it matters little what we call him now, had made the lawyer acquainted with what was required of him.

"Yes, sir, we are all here and ready," Billy answered.

"And haste had better be made with the business," the doctor spoke, gently.

"Well, Mr. Stiverson," the lawyer said, "we are ready to hear your confession. With so many witnesses present we will reduce it to writing."

"Impossible to do so," said the doctor, warning them again. "You had better make what haste you can, gentlemen."

"Yes, I will hasten," spoke the dying banker, "for I can feel that the end is very near. This is my story, in brief, and it is the solemn truth, every word. Pay close attention."

"People who knew Gaffner Stiverson and me a dozen years ago can tell you how closely we resembled each other in looks. We were often mistaken one for the other. He and I were friends, and often helped each other in business, and I knew pretty much all of his."

"But, at last, we quarreled, over a trifling matter. It was in my office, one night, and in my anger I hurled a paper weight at him and it struck him on the head, killing him instantly. I was almost crazed at what I had done, and what to do I did not know. I saw the gallows looming up before me, and believed that my only hope lay in concealing my crime."

"At first I thought of changing clothes with him, and making it to appear, if possible, that it was I that had been killed; but immediately I saw how useless that would be, for then the crime would fall upon Stiverson, and I would probably suffer for it all the same. But, that thought gave rise to another, which I seized upon with all the hope born of despair. Could I not carry on both personalities? I would try it, let come what might."

"I carried the body down into the dark cellar under the building, and there I buried it deeply and carefully, spending all night over the task. I had, of course, removed all the clothing, and the body was buried stark naked. That done, I put on the dead man's clothing, packed my own in a grip, and set out at once for Philadelphia, and from there telegraphed in both names that I had been called suddenly away, stating when I might be expected home. I made a difference of three days in the time, so that I might carry on one character that length of time."

"I came back as Gaffner Stiverson, fell into his place, and in a little time I had my grip upon his affairs so that I was able to carry on the deception successfully. Then I had to be called away for a few days, in order that Hickman Shyrock might reappear. I hired a room permanently in a cheap hotel at Newark, and taking the train for Philadelphia, would get off there nine cases out of ten, returning to this city within the hour as another man. I opened branches of both businesses in Philadelphia, in order to hide my secret work, and so for years I have carried on my double life to the present time."

He had been speaking in a low, excited tone, and now he stopped for want of breath.

The doctor, with finger on his pulse, shook his head in an ominous manner, as if to signify that the end was drawing near.

"My marriage with this woman," the dying man presently went on, "was the outcome of an attempt on her part to blackmail me, a scheme which I was in no position to fight, for it would place me in danger of exposure, and my crime might become known. I fell into her snare an easy prey, and my pity for her in this hour is not very keen. Whatever position she finds herself in, she has herself to blame for it. But to my murdered friend's child I have tried to be a father, indeed, trying to make up in some measure for my crime in my goodness to her. I have not been blind to the fact that my son loved her, and I have done all in my power to oppose their union, for he is in no way worthy of her. There was little danger of his success, however, for she despises him, and it is with

pleasure that I learn she loves Vance Willey, a prince among men.

"To you, my wife, and you, my daughter, what can I say? If you can forgive me, do so. You are aware, Grace, that Spencer Witherton loves you. You cannot make a better choice of a worthy man. Marry him. For you, my wife, my love has never dimmed, and my deception with you has ever been a burden upon my soul. I have hated myself for it, and more than once have I seriously contemplated ending it in suicide. Forgive me if you can find it in your heart to do so. You can never know how I have suffered. I have no more to say, nor strength to say it if I had. I am dying. My fortune I have willed to you and Grace cutting Horace off with a dollar, for I have seen the evil of his way. The Stiverson fortune will go to Florence of course. This woman can claim none of it, for she was never the wife of Gaffner Stiverson. I would recommend her to the continued companionship of Beaumont Robiston. I have not been altogether blind to their clandestine schemes."

Mr. Shyrock paused again, as if to rest, but with a sudden sigh he expired.

The end of his double life had come.

For several minutes the room was silent, save for the sobbing of Mrs. Shyrock and her daughter, and Florence Stiverson.

The latter was the first to speak. Stepping forward to Mrs. Shyrock and her daughter, and placing an arm around each neck, she said with deep feeling:

"My mother, my sister, let us forgive him. His burden was a heavy one, and many a time I have seen him in agony and tears when he thought no one saw him. Let us forgive him."

And so they did. Clasped in one another's arms, their tears commingled, and in that moment the past was buried and the future opened for them anew. The rivalry between the two girls was ended at the same time, and their embrace done, each turned and gave her hand to the man who loved her most.

To mention all that was said and done is now impossible, for space will not allow. The guilty ones were led away by the detectives, and were finally sent to the fate they justly deserved. Vance Willey and Florence Stiverson, and Spencer Witherton and Grace Shyrock, were eventually married, and all are as happy as the average of those who launch upon the matrimonial sea.

Broadway Billy and his Beagles were given much praise for the manner in which they had worked out the case so brief a time. When Billy and the superintendent opened the notes they had sealed in each other's presence, it was found that both papers were worded exactly the same—"Hickman Shyrock and Gaffner Stiverson one man." It had so turned out. Billy and the boys are still in the harness, ready for anything that may turn up, and it will be our pleasure, at no distant day, to tell of their further doings.

THE END.

Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Rival: OR, OLD GIDEON'S WIPE-OUT.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

OPENING SCENE.

DEADWOOD DICK DOWNED.

"HANDS up, Deadwood Dick!"

Ringing the order, startling the command, prompt the compliance!

A horseman, medium in size but broad of shoulder and strong of limb, suddenly confronted by half a dozen armed men.

The rider was a young man, seemingly not over thirty years of age, with dark hair and mustache and keen, piercing, magnetic black eyes; and having brought his horse to a stop he coolly asked:

"Well, what's wanted?"

"You ar' wanted, Deadwood Dick, that's what's wanted," he was promptly told. "You have come to ther end of yer rope now—or anyhow ye will be at the end of et in less 'n an hour—the noose end."

The lone horseman smiled, spite of his dangerous situation.

"You have made a mistake this time, gentlemen," he declared. "My name is not Deadwood Dick."

"Bah! go tell that ar' to the buzzards, won't yer? Don't ye s'pose we know ye well enough?"

"But," and the horseman spoke seriously, "I tell you I am not he. For once in your life, my man, you have made a mistake."

"That don't go down. You can't git off wi' that kind o' yarn."

"It is the truth."

"An' I tell ye I know better. I haven't gone cross-eyed sence I seen ye last time, an' I guess I'd orter know ye. Dusky Dick is waitin' fur ye, and that will be a choker party when we take ye in. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Dusky Dick, the Dark Dread? You would not give me into *his* hands? By all that you hold dear I entreat you to let me go, and I will reward you greatly. I will take you with me and give you *double* what you can hope to gain by serving this devil in human guise."

"Ha! ha! ha! Show ther white feather, do ye? I thort ye would, ef ever we got our claws on ye. Nary a let go fer you, Deadwood Dick, till we let ye go at ther end of a rope. Ther captain has been expectin' you, sooner or later, and has been ready and waitin' to receive ye. Keep yerself quiet, now, or you'll have ter be taken to him dead."

The leader of the half-dozen had given a signal, and his companions had flung themselves upon the horseman and were binding him hands and feet.

"But I tell you this is a mistake!" the prisoner protested, struggling to free himself. "I am not Deadwood Dick! Free me, and give me a chance to prove who and what I am!"

"Nary a free, me noble Richard. We'll hang ye first, and then try yer case after that, and ef we find ye innercent we'll draw up reserlshuns of regret, or somethin' of that sort. Bring him on, pards, and we'll hand him over to ther captain fer him ter deal with."

Their work accomplished, they moved forward, one of their number running on ahead as though to carry the good news in advance.

Deadwood Dick, if it washe, was in a desperate strait.

"Hyer they come! Hyer they come!"

So cried the crowd, and the guardsmen, with their prisoner, were seen approaching.

They shouted and hurrahed wildly then until the party came near, when those who claimed to have seen Deadwood Dick before cried out:

"That's him, captain! Don't need but one look at that face, ter know et! He is ther cuss! Rooster Rube has made no mistake! You are in ther fix of yer life this time, boy!"

The prisoner, pale, but determined, faced the angry crowd without flinching in the least.

"Deadwood Dick, I am glad for this opportunity of making your acquaintance," greeted Dusky Dick, with mock politeness.

"I can't say that I'm proud to make yours," was the stern retort. "But I desire to set you right on one point—I am not Deadwood Dick! I have no desire to rob that gentleman of any honors that are rightfully his."

The crowd laughed loudly at that.

"No, I suppose not," rejoined the chief. "But, as it happens, you are positively recognized by at least half a dozen men here, so your story don't go down. And if there could possibly be a mistake it wouldn't help you any, for we'd give you the benefit of the doubt and hang you anyhow."

"He can bet his life we would!—beggin' your pardon, cap'n, fer stickin' in my lip," cried Gideon Gipes. "Thar's war to ther knife 'tween us and you. Dealer-than-wood Richard, and that war will be ended right hyer, you bet."

"You needn't beg pardon of me for talking that way, pard," the brigand chief waived.

"But, I tell you you do mistake," urged the prisoner. "Search me, if you will, and see if you find anything on me to prove what you charge."

"What's ther use?" cried Rooster Rube. "We wouldn't expect ter find ye comin' hyer with yer name branded on ye."

"That's what's ther matter!" cried another of the crowd. "Et ain't no use."

"What is your name, then, since you deny your identity as Deadwood Dick?" asked the Dread.

"My name is Philip Phillips."

"Philip Phillips lies like sin," cried Rooster Rube. "Confound it, what is ther use o' your holdin' out when so many of us knows ye?"

"What ar' ye going to do with him, though, Captain Dick?" inquired old Gideon. "A new idee has jest popped inter my mind, the reason I ask. Do ye *really* mean ter yank him?"

"Certainly I mean it! What else do you think I would do with him? But, what is your idea?"

The old man was about to respond, when a woman's scream was heard.

All looked in the direction whence the sound had come, and beheld a woman running toward them, arms outstretched.

"Save him!" she cried. "Save him! oh! save him!"

"Thunder!" cried Dusky Dick, and his face grew darker than ever. "How has she managed to escape?"

Even as he questioned, a hideous old hag was seen running after the woman, and as she ran she called out loudly to the crowd:

"Ketch that she wildcat! Ketch her! I'll bet I'll scar her purty face fer her, fer the trick she played on me! Don't let her 'scape, and don't let her git no weepion!"

On the woman came, apparently seeing nothing but the prisoner, and she pushed her way toward him till roughly stopped by Dusky Dick.

"Here, what means this?" he demanded.

"Richard! Richard!" the woman—rather girl—cried, "why did you venture here? They will murder you!"

"My God!" the prisoner gasped, as if intended to be unheard. "Kate—"

But he cut himself short at that, while the crowd broke out with a wild whoop.

"Ain't that ther proof?" they yelled. "She has called him Richard; what more d'ye want 'n that? Let's string him right up, let's have ther fun right now while we all feel like et."

"No! no! no!" the young woman cried, wildly. "Spare him, spare him! Take my life, if you will, but spare him!"

"Oh, yes, we are full of that, you bet!" laughed Dusky Dick, detaining her by force. "We prefer beauty to the beast, every time, my little tiger cat. Don't hurt yourself struggling so."

The young woman, who could not be more than twenty-two years of age, fought like a tiger to free herself.

"Let me go, monster!" she cried. "Let me go! If you will kill him, show me the mercy to let me die with him."

The man had tried to force himself to be calm, but impossible. He now tugged at his bonds till the veins stood out upon his face like ridges raised by the blows of a whip.

"Free me," he hissed, "and I'll fight the whole of you! Free me, and more than one of you shall bite the dust before you deal death to me. Free me, just long enough to—"

"Well, hardly," drawled the brigand chief. "We'll take care of you, and then we'll see that the lady is well cared for after that, so there will be nothing for you to worry about. Sorry not to oblige you, but it can't—"

"Curse you! I'll have—"

The desperate struggling of the prisoner had loosened his feet, which had been tied together underneath his horse, and he slipped over and would have toppled off had it not been for old Gideon, who sprung forward and caught him in his arms, and together they fell to the ground.

"No, ye don't!" he cried aloud, the next moment. "No, ye don't, me noble Dicky Deadwood! Not while Gideon Gipes is around ter take a hand in things. Whar's that ar' rope ye ar' goin' ter use, cap'n?"

With a wild scream, at that, the woman fainted, and Dusky Dick gave her into the arms of the old hag, saying:

"Here, Jezebel, take her back; and mind, you do not harm one hair of her head, if you value your withered old life. Bring a rope, boys, and short work shall be made of Deadwood Dick. Bring him to his feet, Gideon, and we'll show you how we do such business here at Bank Garden."

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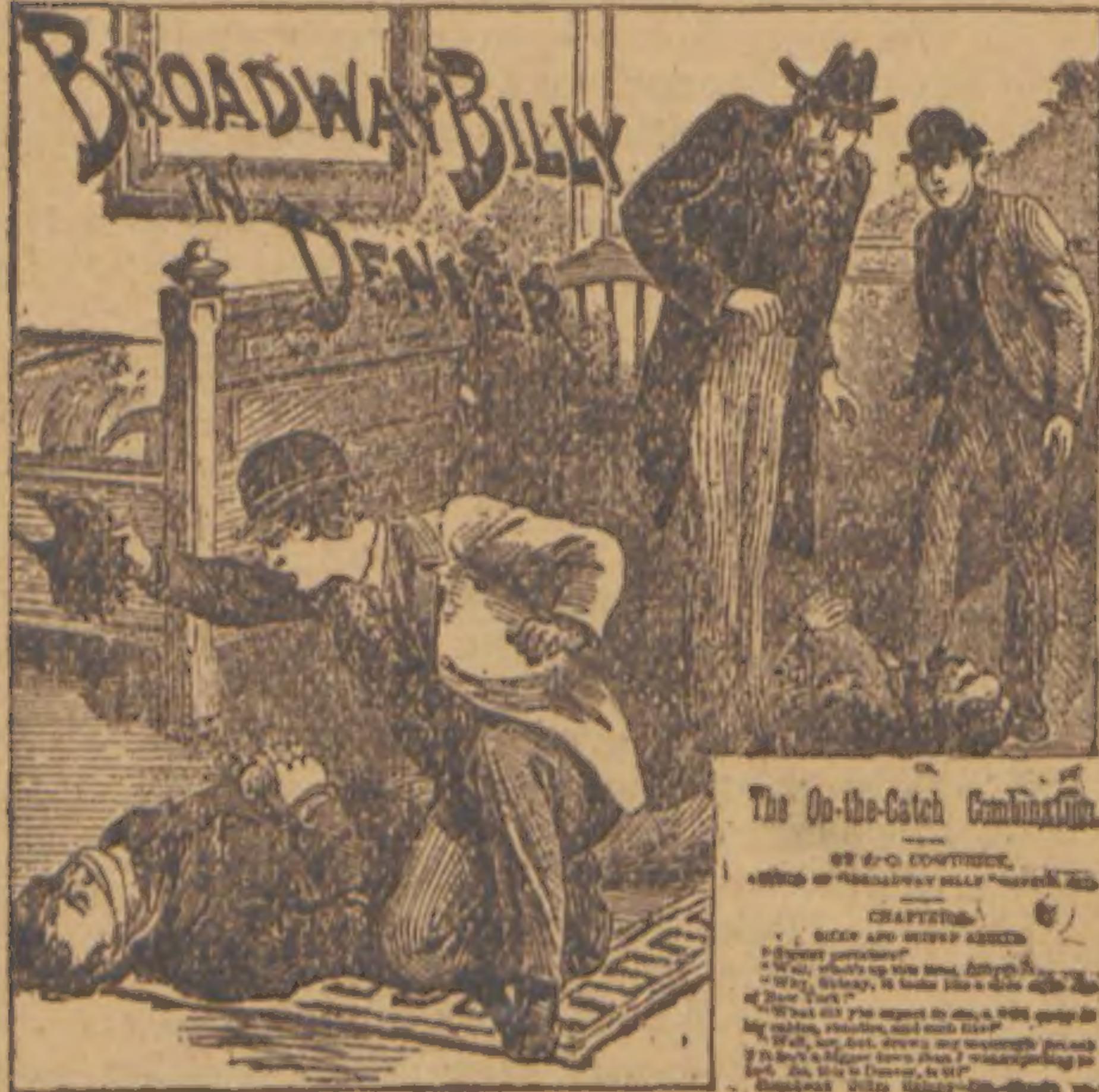
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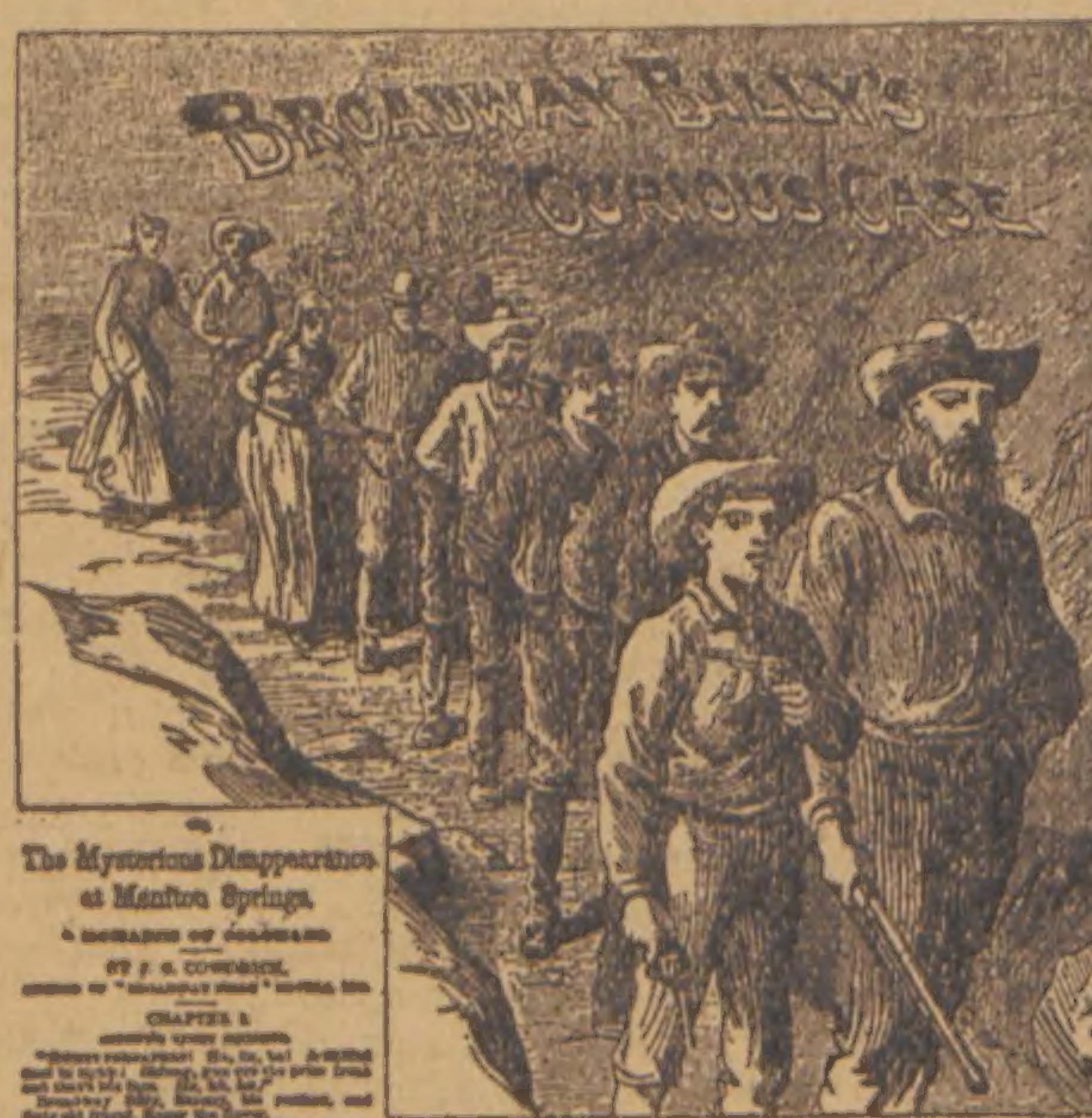
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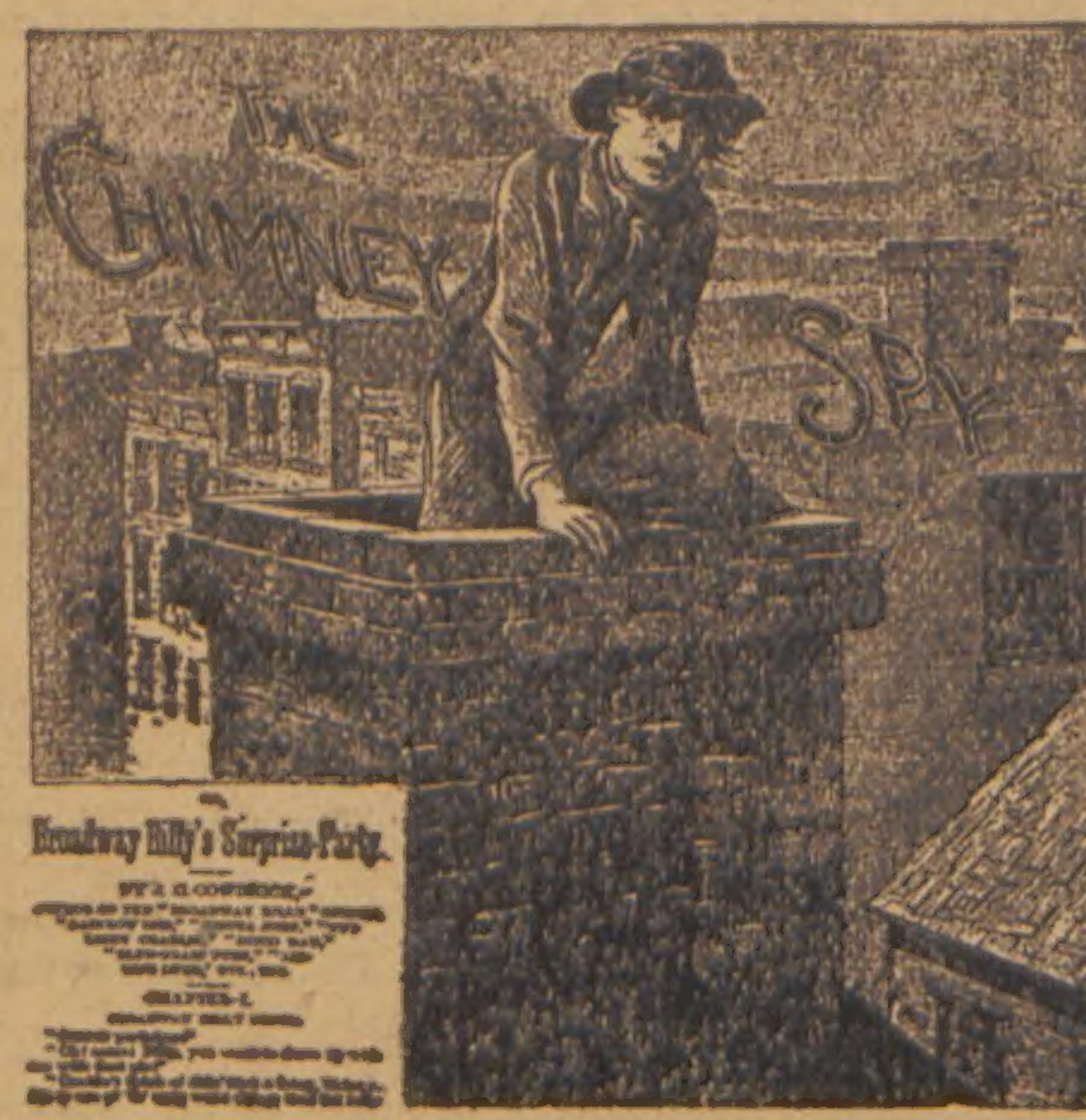
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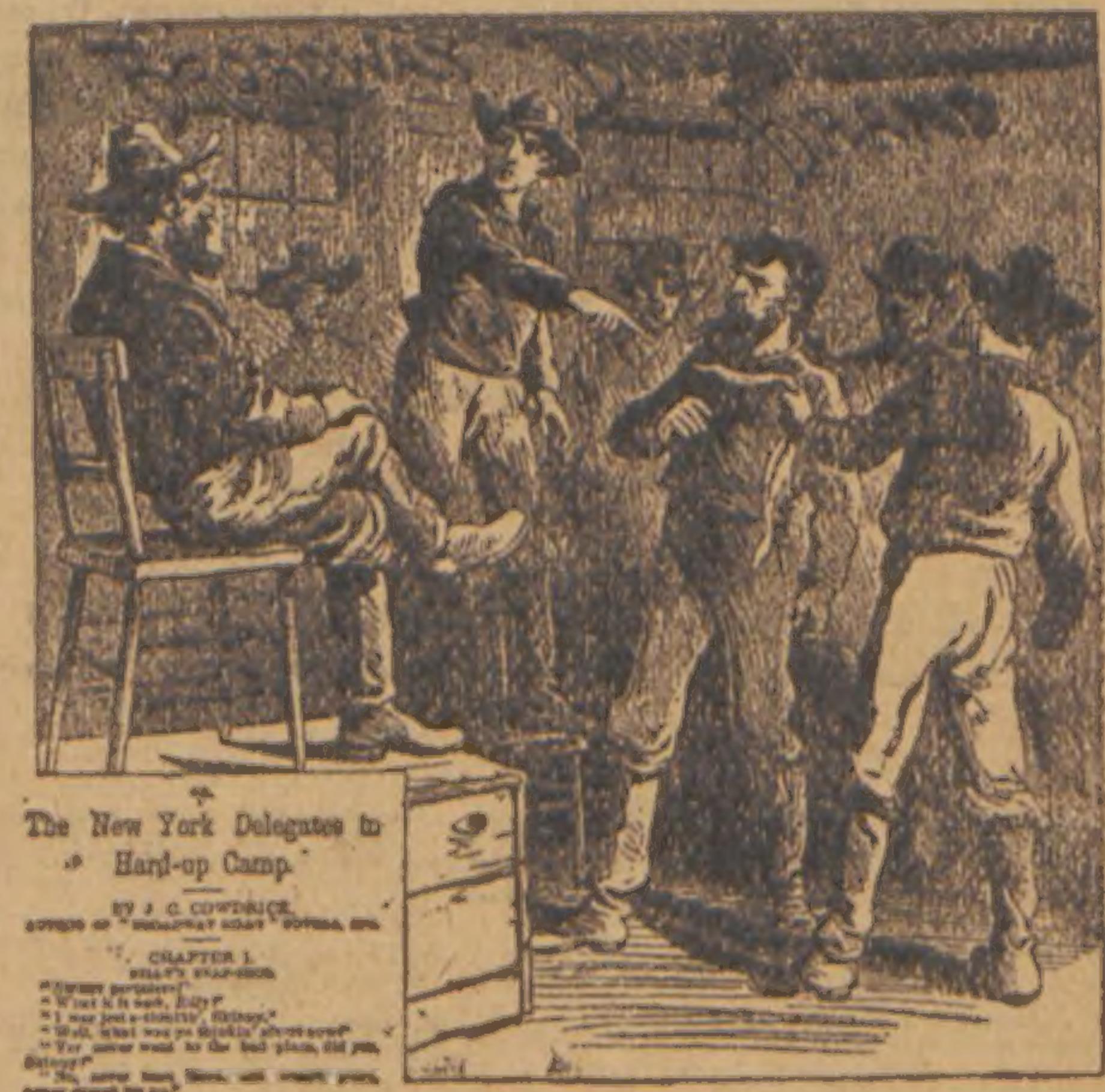


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